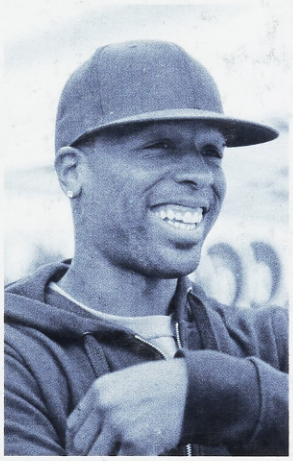
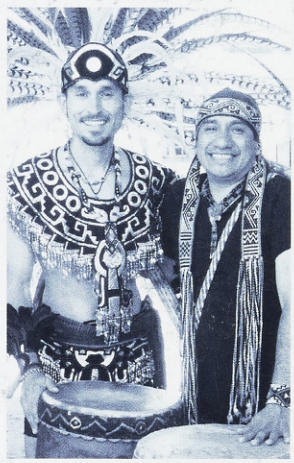
GOLDEN GATE CONVERSATIONS

Sue Mark





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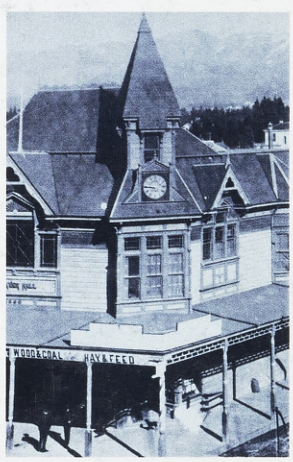

PHOTO KEY (IMAGES LEFT TO RIGHT)

LONG-TIME NEIGHBOR Josephine Lee, founder & director of the Golden Gate Branch Library's Summer Jazz Concerts 2015 Photo by Matt Dibble	**HISTORIC SITE** Oakland Public Library's Golden Gate Branch Library, a Carnegie endowed building constructed in 1918 2017	**FARMERS' MARKET** Phat Beets Food Justice Market & CSA, Toveo Hill, market manager 2014	**HISTORIC SITE** The Fratellanza Club, a still active neighborhood Italian social club founded in 1932 at 1140 66th Street 2014	**NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVISTS** Aztec dancers Gerardo Omar Marin & Ernesto Hernandez Olmos at PLACE for Sustainable Living's annual Creating Commons event 2014
HISTORIC SITE St. Columba Church's front lawn with crosses marking annual homicides in Oakland 2014 Photo by Gene Anderson	**HISTORIC SITE** Father Aidan McAleenan, pastor of St. Columba, a neighborhood church since the 1880s 2015 Photo by Matt Dibble	**FARMERS' MARKET** Phat Beets Food Justice Market & CSA on Grace Street by Destiny Arts 2014 Photo by Lorah Gross	Commons Archive COMMONS ARCHIVE commons archive Commons Archive Commons Archive COMMONS ARCHIVE Commons Archive Commons Archive	**HISTORIC SITE** Klinkner Hall (1886–1942), the East Bay's largest gathering site at San Pablo Avenue & 59th Street circa 1890 Courtesy Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room
NEIGHBORHOOD SIGN One of several Golden Gate welcome signs, this one at Stanford Avenue & San Pablo Avenue 2014 Photo by Gene Anderson		**FARMERS' MARKET** Phat Beets Food Justice Market & CSA during Communities' Crossing, a series of neighborhood history events 2015	**HISTORIC SITE** Archival image of one of many Klinknerville advertisements 1885 Courtesy Emeryville Historical Society	**NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVISTS** Family photo of Eugene Lasartemay, one of the founders of the East Bay Negro Historical Society 1959

Photos by marksearch unless noted

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Phat Beets Food Justice Market & CSA on
Grace Street by Destiny Arts, 2014

Photo by Lorah Gross

GOLDEN GATE CONVERSATIONS

Sue Mark

2015

marksearch

Oakland Public Library
Golden Gate Branch
5606 San Pablo Avenue
Oakland, CA

COMMONS ARCHIVE

Collaborators

marksearch

Golden Gate Branch Library

Oakland Public Library

Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room

African American Museum & Library at Oakland

Friends of the Golden Gate Library

Golden Gate Community Association

PLACE for Sustainable Living

Golden Gate Recreation Center

Emeryville Center of Community Life

Emeryville Historical Society

Emeryville Senior Center

North Oakland Senior Center

Kala Art Institute

Commons Archive

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Each interviewee has granted Sue Mark permission to publish their full interview transcript.

Commons Archive is a project initiated by cultural researcher Sue Mark in collaboration with stakeholders in the Golden Gate Branch Library service area (North Oakland, South Berkeley, Emeryville). The views expressed by individuals or in materials developed as part of Commons Archive are representative of the project's collective conception and production and are not necessarily the views of the Oakland Public Library or any other individual involved.

INTRODUCTION

"Who are we? What is this place? Who does it belong to?"

"Sharing local history brings us closer together as things change."

–Golden Gate neighbors

Whose stories are preserved and whose are lost? This large question is at the heart of Commons Archive, a neighborhood memory bank organized by cultural researcher Sue Mark at North Oakland's Golden Gate Branch Library. Initiated in 2016 in response to profound demographic shifts impacting this community, Commons Archive includes materials, special programs and installations throughout the library. The archive's unconventional format highlights recollections that, if undocumented, will disappear.

Commons Archive honors neighbors' multiple roles as participants, narrators and creators of the many histories of this dynamically changing area. This neighborhood's lifecycle has moved at varying rates: over the past five years, this wedge of North Oakland, South Berkeley and Emeryville has experienced profound shifts, sparking debates among residents about local identity.

As a longstanding community anchor, the Golden Gate Branch Library bears witness to the neighborhood's changes. This branch has served hundreds of thousands of neighbors since opening its doors on December 15, 1918. From youth clubs to Diwali festivals, garden shows to film screenings, the library strives to reflect the diversity of the neighborhood.

Commons Archive enriches this goal by holding in place the stories of those who have lived here and providing access to these stories for years to come. As neighbors continue to flow through the community, the archive will stand to preserve these memories.

The Golden Gate Library Local Collection presents some materials that were, up until now, stored in basements, locked file cabinet and forgotten boxes. These newsletters, journals, unpublished papers, articles, scrapbooks and reports describe a neighborhood that has been and will continue to be supported by a vital network of local organizations. The Local

Collection brings together narratives of the dedicated efforts of neighbors and community-based organizations.

Commons Archive not only peels back the neighborhood's layers but also stretches towards the future. We hope that these materials will become an invaluable resource for neighbors and researchers. We invite you to add to this growing pool of information by commenting on these materials, sharing your experiences in the community and inviting your neighbor to join the process.

Sue Mark
Cultural Researcher
marksearch

Erin Sanders
Manager
Golden Gate Branch Library

2019

PREFACE
GOLDEN GATE CONVERSATIONS

People are living archives of the memories, incidents, stories and experiences that shape their neighborhoods. This organic, collective knowledge reflects complex neighbor relationships, and these nonlinear histories are everywhere, without clear beginnings and endings. When does the story of a place start? It all depends on who you talk to. In early 2015, I began to look for ways to gather and share Golden Gate's histories to understand the impacts of the area's recent changes. To do this, I needed to know people, and to get to know people, I had to build trust. Though I live in North Oakland and have for nearly 20 years, I'm still an outsider to the Golden Gate neighborhood. It was only after seeing me at four different community events that Laura, a longtime neighbor and activist, gave me an insider's contact list.

That sparked six months of candid conversations with diverse neighbors, black and white, female and male, new and old. Neighbors introduced me to other neighbors, resulting in this collection's 12 recorded conversations. These stories naturally offer no consensus; they are the palimpsest of this neighborhood's many life-cycles. Meetings in kitchens, living rooms and cafes revealed neighborly sagas big and small: the legacy of the crack epidemic and the rise of block clubs; the kindness of next-door neighbors in times of distress; the shift in demographics today, and in the 1950s; the role of dogs as protectors versus companions; why and where to build fences and how to pinpoint gentrification.

In 2015, *Communities' Crossing* was part of Print Public, Kala Art Institute's initiative to find a deeper connection with its surroundings. Located where Berkeley, Emeryville and Oakland meet, this 40-year old art-making hub offers professional facilities to artists working in and across print and digital media. Kala teamed up with UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design, and provided me with the unique opportunity to partner with urban planner Anisha Gade to explore this region through the lens of creative place-making. *Communities' Crossing* unfolded as a series of unconventional programs to engage neighbors and share the area's histories: neighborhood walking discussions led by knowledge bearers; on-the-street improv performances based on collected stories; a gallery installation with video, large photo banners and signs displaying neighbors' messages.

As with many creative place-making projects, this one was concerned with this elusive yet overused concept of 'sense of place.' In these conversations, newcomers and longtime neighbors repeatedly expressed that 'sense of place' cannot be created or simply discovered. Understanding what makes a neighborhood distinct is essential, yet essentially intangible. It depends on a seasoned process of getting to know your neighbors.

Stories like these are easily lost. I am fortunate to have worked with the talented documentarian Matt Dibble, who filmed all of these conversations. Urged by neighbors to find a permanent form for these stories, we began to develop Commons Archive. I am indebted to the neighbors who shared their histories for this volume.

"MORE THAN ANYTHING, LIVING HERE IS ABOUT COMMUNICATION."

–Josh Bergstrom

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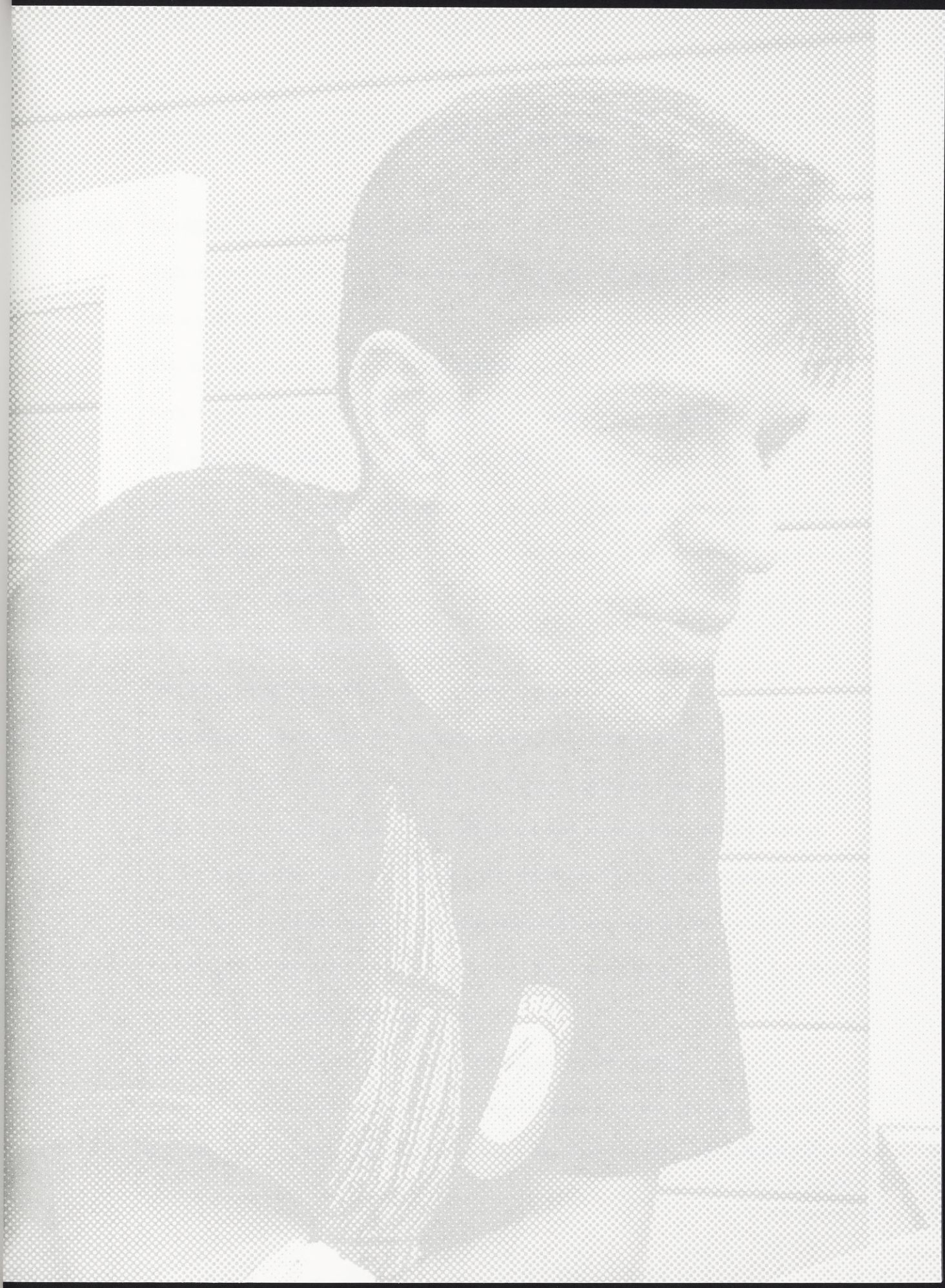

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Josh Bergstrom, 2015

Photo by Sue Mark

	marksearch_Josh Bergstrom 12/27/2014 Video Transcript
00:20	**Sue Mark:** So, can you tell us who you are? **Josh:** My name is Josh Bergstrom and I live here with my wife, Molly and my soon to be three year-old son, Diego. **SM:** How long have you lived in this neighborhood? **Josh:** I have lived here since 2005. We bought this house and we've been here since then. **SM:** How did you come to the neighborhood? What brought you here? **Josh:** Soon after finishing college, I got a job and moved over into Oakland and the office that I used to work in is right across the street from here. So, at the time I had an apartment up in the Temescal district and mostly lived up there until 2005. But I didn't go very far. I've always been right around this area of North Oakland.
01:17	**SM:** What brought you right to this spot? Why did you chose this house? **Josh:** We got a call one day from some friends of ours and there was a couple and another friend who had been working with a real estate agent, looking for a group housing sort of situation and so we got a phone call one afternoon from another friend of ours who had started working with them as well because they found out that these houses were for sale, or their agent found out that this little group of eight houses were on the market and so we, my wife and I at that point had been married for about a year and we said "Sure. Let's find out more" and we jumped into the process. **SM:** What did you find out about these eight houses that were together? **Josh:** They were all rentals at the time and they had been for at ten, fifteen years before then, maybe longer. Six of the houses were owned by one group of people and so there's

02:21 basically a group of three houses with one yard, another group of three houses with one yard. Those six were all owned by one group of people. The property in the middle of those has two houses and those are owned by a different family. Initially, we were told that all eight were on the market, so we started grabbing more people that we knew to see if they would be interested, that we knew were looking for housing or interested in some kind of group living situation. So, we just started looking, trying to assemble a group of people that were interested and could work together to move in over here.

SM: What happened with the eight houses with this two-ownership situation?

Josh: As it turns out, they all had – there was one property manager, rental manager for all of the eight houses even though the owners were different. It was that rental manager that was marketing the houses and she had never formalized a deal or any kind of listing agreement with the family that owned the property in the middle. So, we gathered this

03:37 group of people and we were assembling some sort of offer to put on the place and pretty far into that process we found out that, in fact, these were not on the market and the family that owned that middle property, of course, thought they were getting swindled. There was a lot of animosity and tension that came out of that. Understandably, they have a lot of sentimental ties to the property that now it is a set of three siblings that own the property. It's their grandparents that initially – and their family bought the house. At the very least, the grandfather lifted up the houses and put additions on them so there is a lot of emotional family ties as to the property and the houses. At the time, the front of the house, the 65th Street side of that property was occupied by some renters and the back house was empty. They've since renovated those houses and one of those owners lives in the house with his wife and they rent out the back house. So, the deal kind of fell apart and we did try to

05:00	contact them but that didn't work out and we had a good group of people that we came out with that we all work together. We knew each other from doing different projects together so we already had a lot of history between most of us on putting together different, big campouts, concerts, fashion shows. We had worked together quite a bit so we had some level of self-organizing skills and so it just all clicked. We liked it so much, we decided to look for some other places. We ended up putting an offer on a different set of houses and that didn't work out. The initial offer, I think, was in April and then in May or June we found out that six of the eight houses, two different sets of three, basically, were, in fact, available on the real estate market. We put together an offer and ended up buying them. **SM:** What do you know about the history of these houses? Why are they in a cluster like this?
06:25	**Josh:** A couple of different theories, and the history on these things suggests that they might have been the housing for the workers on the dairy farm. There's a farm house across the street. That's one of the oldest houses in Oakland and that was part of a dairy farm and so this whole area was dairy farms, as far as I know. Behind us is Peabody Lane which is one of the older streets in the area, also coming off of San Pablo. It went down to some docks and there were canneries along down that road as well. As far as we can tell, that's probably how these houses started. They were the housing for the workers on these farms and for the factories that were nearby. **SM:** What was it like to develop this housing? What did you know about cohousing? **Josh:** Not much. All the people that we were moving into these houses with had lived in different big houses with renters and in different groups of renting situations. A couple of people, one of the original people working with a real estate agent was a landscape architect

07:45	and I think through her architecture background she had gotten involved with some co-housing projects and worked on that. So, she had a little bit more research behind it all but really it wasn't until we got the phone call saying "Hey there are these houses. Do you want to move in?' That's when I started learning what co-housing was, the history of it and starting to research it a little bit more and we moved in with this idea that we wanted to develop this co-housing situation and we went through this really long process of realizing we don't even know if we want to be what this definition of co-housing is and how do we like living, and does it really fit that definition. When we moved in, we were initially – these houses were in terrible shape and they needed a lot of work and on top of all of the work we were each doing on our own houses and in the yards, we were meeting once a week and just talking through our process for decision making, our legal ties together, and how we even come to decisions together. What is our decision making process? And then that got
09:04	deeper in, well, wait a minute, what are our commonalities and what are our common goals, and hashing that out. So for a couple, two or three years we were meeting every week, talking about this stuff in the evenings after work, after school. Then on the weekends, working on our houses. It was a very intense project. I have learned a lot more about cohousing through all of that. We also started to meet people who also live in other cohousing situations in the area and learning from them, and getting a lot of help from some of the cohousing community through that. **SM:** So, how would you describe the experience of co-housing? **Josh:** Intense. I still don't think that we're really cohousing. We were having these meetings every week. We would do more thorough workshops together; we did things like had facilitators come over a day, and we did nonverbal communication workshops together

10:25	where we had enough people where we were doing them here or we were going places and doing those things together. More than anything, living here in this group is about communication. Cohousing as we've been living here had been all about supporting each other. It's been everything that you kind of don't verbalize about family. It's knowing that you're frustrated with somebody but when they need help, you're going to help them anyways. **SM:** And what's the name you've come up with for this group? **Josh:** We moved as Triple Point Cohousing and triple point being that coming together of Oakland and Emeryville, and Berkeley and we considered the history of Klinkner (Phonetics),
11:21	and Klinknerville and we somehow came up with the triple point idea and went with it. **SM:** What did you know about Klinkner? **Josh:** Not much more than that he was a developer in the area and he had built some of the houses of a friend of mine. Robyn known a lot about the history of the architecture around here and I had heard from him about some of the houses that Klinkner had built around here, so I recognized some of those and also some of the wild things that Klinkner did like putting his livestock up in the air painted to try to advertise his development. And he's got a really interesting name so it was really intriguing to think that we could reestablish this Klinknerville that started here and we hadn't really heard of until we moved over here and started looking into the history of the place. **SM:** How did you start to get to know some of your other neighbors? **Josh:** When we first moved in here it was this set of eight houses. The property next to us was empty and now there is a seven-story building there. The property across the street that now is a five story building, that was under construction. Everything else on the block was

12:42 commercial and industrial. There were even, as you go a couple blocks into Emeryville, there's a lot of condos and townhomes, those were all not there or under construction. So, during the week work hours there were lots of people around and once work was over, it was a ghost town. On the weekends it was very empty around here. So, we didn't have a whole lot of neighbors immediately for the first couple, three, four years. We started to meet some of the people who live behind us. So, as we were just walking around – my wife and I have a dog. We met a lot of people out walking the dog and just being in the neighborhood.

SM: And how did your relationship grow with your neighbors that are sandwiched between the houses?

Josh: The first time we really cooperated on something, the fence between our yards was falling down and rotting and I proposed to our neighbors, 'cause even though there was that animosity from when we tried to buy the places, we had exchanged numbers and we knew

13:47 that we had these properties next to each other. So, the fence was falling down, I got in touch with one of the siblings and suggested replacing the fence and I think it was even his initiative saying "Well, let's come up with a design and I'll pay for half of it." And we working together on that. That was the first time we cooperated on anything. The front of this property was a small, chain link fence and very overgrown with all kinds of miscellaneous stuff. One of the first big projects we did as a community was put a new, rip all that out and put a new fence and landscaping and planter boxes up there. Once the family next door, The Ammatoni's, started to see that I think they recognized that we are really investing ourselves in living here and we weren't just speculating on the real estate market and trying to swindle them out of their money or out of their property. In talking to one of the siblings, Ron, he's

15:00	expressed how much he loves living here and how much he values this little community of houses. So, I think seeing that we are really investing ourselves here made a big difference and we started to get to know each other better. **SM:** What about some of the other changes that you've seen in the neighborhood? What have you seen going on in the past nine, ten years? **Josh:** Wow! We've been here nine years. When we moved in there was not much around so now we have five cafés within about two blocks. We have a cupcakery and a nice yarn shop. Things have changed quite a bit. There's a lot more people on the street, a lot more eyes about. It's a very different dynamic walking around here, in the evenings especially. There's, two doors, three doors over there's a big warehouse and that's been a band practice space and some people live in the warehouse since I first came to the area in '96. So, that has always been a bit of a hub of an art community and vibrant music and activity, art activity
16:32	over there. But now that's this giant, very much more organized art gallery. Things have changed quite a bit in the sense that even things like this on the outskirts, kind of on the outskirts renegade warehouse is now this very organized art gallery. **SM:** Can you talk about what was happening when the development was growing on the corner that's right next to your place? **Josh:** In what aspect? We had this giant construction site basically next to us and we didn't have too much activity. There were certainly some ladies of the evening that would be on the streets around here or hanging out in alleyways sometimes. But as more people have started to live around here and walk around here, they – it's cleaned up, which means everything has moved to a different area of Oakland, unfortunately. **SM:** You talked about, when we first talked, conversations you had with the builders of the

17:55	building between your property? **Josh:** When we bought the houses, they already had the permits approved to build their seven story condo building. We learned a lot about the Oakland City permitting process that quickly. And we were able to influence the design process. Going to the design review committee meetings afterwards and we ended up having a couple meetings with the developer and his architects and so they did end up putting in these planter boxes across the edge of their development, and there is some tall bamboo growing in there. So, that provided a little bit of screen between us and that building. Visually and also the background noise of the bamboo blowing in the constant wind that's around here, that helps quite a bit. You know, of course, it takes some getting used to but the thing I miss the most, now that that building is there, is that you don't see the hills from our backyard; there is this giant building there. On the other side of that, if I can see any positive out of it, is that that
19:12	building screens a lot of noise from San Pablo major thoroughfare. So, it gives us a quiet retreat on the backside of that building. **SM:** What would you like to see as time moves on? What kind of visions do you have for the neighborhood and, say, people knowing more about history or their relationship to what's been and what's now? What kinds of ideas do you have? **Josh:** This area is just bound to get more and more densely populated and I think that's inevitable. We are seeing it. We have another 18 condo units about to finish construction across the street. Across the street where the farmhouse is, that has approved permits to be another five-story condo buildings. So, it's just bound to happen and even it is kind of strange to think that I am one of the longer, older people in the neighborhood when I've only been here nine years, but all of these – most of the people who are walking around the
20:35	

	neighborhood now are very recent residents in this area and I would love it if people have a way to find out more about the history about this area. How this little wedge of Oakland is Oakland instead of part of Emeryville and another thing that was kind of appealing when we first moved in here was that we were on the outskirts of these three cities so, good and bad, but that also meant you're on the outskirts of this city where there is less resources and so we didn't have as many police over in this area and patrolling around and, generally, it added to the ghost town feeling. Now that there are a lot more people around here, the atmosphere I think has changed a little bit. But that's still kind of the essential part of the original fabric of this area. It was on the outskirts of where the wild, wild west Emeryville was at, and this little wedge of Oakland, but Oakland didn't really care about this area and that's where this small community, small town has come from. I think people would be interested to hear a little bit of that history somehow, or see it.
21:57	**SM:** With all these new people that are coming in, how do you get to know them? What is your relationship like with them?
	Josh: I've gotten to known a couple of people just through being out in the front and people walking their dogs is a way to meet new people around the neighborhood and now that I have an almost three year-old son, we see other kids on the street or at the park and we've met some of the neighbors through that but a lot of it is just being out walking around.
	SM: What's the main difference between, say, your relationship with the people that you live close to and the people who live in the condos?
	Josh: I have a lot of history with the people we moved in here with and one of our neighbors went to high school with my wife and I've known him and another friend since the early 90s, so we knew each other for quite a while before moving in here. So, there's that
23:08	

24:29	bond that time brings and we don't see each other often but we have that relationship established and we've been through all of the – everything we have been through here has certainly built on that. I might mention that besides marriage, being in this cohousing project is the biggest communication lesson that I have ever learned, been through, ever experienced. So, we have a really strong community, I think, through that. As I interact more with the neighbors who live next door, these people who have had this house for now three generations, we're starting to build a relationship and become – and build a trust, the trust of a strong friendship to where we don't talk very often but we know we can call each other when we need help. The house that they rent in the back is now rented to a person that I've known since the mid-90s and so they are getting to know the people that have owned the property more closely. So, we're just building our own little history here in this pocket and a couple of us are now getting more involved with the neighborhood and community around here trying to help with what we can as far as holding on to the history in the area and doing things like supporting new events, and love our neighborhood day. We tried to help with some of the organizing and some of the getting the word out about that. And another one of my neighbors and I have gone out and tried to help out with capturing an inventory of what resources we have in the neighborhood. It is part of the same process of just getting people in the neighborhood to be more active and trying to businesses that are here and trying to see how – trying to plug some of those businesses and resources into the community around us. **SM:** I am just curious what you found as key resources in the neighborhood. **Josh:** You know, we were very much on the go out and look and be eyes and ears for people, so, I haven't even seen all of the different results that they've gotten in process.

25:50	There was a huge – I guess we were building a database that I think Angelina Gennino was organizing and so we were doing a lot of the footwork of going up and down the blocks and cataloguing everybody that's around here. From the sausage factory that's been here for a long time, to the McDonalds and included in that is residences. **SM:** I am just trying to understand the resources. Were you looking at what's available for people to interact with or just kind of what's here economically? **Josh:** At this point, just kind of a snapshot. What's available and what do people have in the neighborhood. After that, I am guessing, but some of the conversation that I had with her about it was starting to look at what is more immediately accessible to the people that are here and do they know about it, do we know about it. **SM:** That's great. I think that building that kind of information is really important. I was
27:14	talking to Angela about that too. You know, what do you do with this information, because I also had been given information from UC student that have been studying the
27:47	neighborhood. So, trying to figure out where is that contained, who has access to it. It is not really part of the city government so there is not really structure in place. That's a big question. Well, I think we covered everything. This looks great. Thank you. **(Audio Ends)**

"WE WANT EVERYBODY TO COME IN, BUT GET TO KNOW US FIRST BEFORE YOU START CHANGING IT."

–Joanne Dickerson-Harper

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BUT GET TO KNOW US FIRST BEFORE
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PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Joanne Dickerson-Harper, 2015

Photo by Matt Dibble

	marksearch_Joanne Dickerson-Harper 12/27/2014 Video Transcript
	Joanne: My name is Joanne. I've been in the neighborhood since 1945, well, my family has. I was born in 1945. My parents had purchased their home before we
00:20	moved in so we officially moved in in 1948. They were renting it out until then.
	Sue Mark: How did your family decide to move this neighborhood?
	Joanne: Well, my mom had always wanted to come to California and actually, her aunt had made the first trip in the 20s. Unfortunately, she ended up with breast cancer and in those days there was nothing to be done about it so they never made the move. So, my mom became a teacher in Louisiana and when the war occurred then they had recruiters that went out not only for men who were skilled, my mom always wanted to come to California and my dad, of course, and she was a school teacher but when World War II started, they were not only recruiting for men who were skilled laborers, they were also recruiting for women to join. At that time it was called The Woman's Army Auxiliary and my mom sat on $50 a month. She wasn't going to get to see much of anything. So she, along with many other women, joined and their jobs were to take the places of the men who were being sent overseas. When she was getting ready to be discharged she thought this was a good time to come to California. And so to California she came.
01:56	**SM:** From where did she come?

02:12	**Joanne:** She came from Fort Des Moines, Iowa and she started working at Naval Supply Center. Nowadays they would call them buyers. My dad, of course, was here because he had come with four of his friends from Texas and my dad was a welder and, of course, they were building ships for the war effort and so they needed those men. His plan was not to stay in California. His plan was to come to California and work, you know, and make lots of California money. Then he was going to go back to Texas. Well, they met and, of course, my mother wanted no part of the south at all. So, daddy was compelled to remain here in California. So, that's how they got here to California. When they were first married, they lived with my godmother and her house was located at 1768 Atlantic, which is now where the post office is. The post office bought all that property there which is in the West Oakland part of Oakland; it's West Oakland. So, the post office that's there on, I guess that's 7th street, the properties that were behind that, so when the post office bought all of that property, there house was one of them. But at that time that hadn't happened. So, of course, I was born and my godmother did not want my parents to leave. They looked all around this area. They looked at a house on Market Street which is still there. They looked everywhere and their main criteria was that it had to be close to school and it had to have a backyard. So, as my dad said, it took him three years to break my mom and I out of my godmother's house. **SM:** Around what year was this? **Joanne:** This was 1948 when they actually moved into their home. So, I was three by

04:05	then and then they moved into the neighborhood. They liked the neighborhood. They liked the fact that we had grocery stores, we had department stores; everything was centrally located. The churches were centrally located, the school, you know, because we had Saint Colombo; we had Golden Gate. At the time it was called Golden Gate which was at that time preschool was called nursery school and it was nursery school through 9th grade. So, you stayed at the same school until, you know, from nursery school through 9th grade. That's what really attracted them about the area. There was the bus. The transportation was wonderful. So they didn't have to have a car, although, you know, they did. And if they wanted to, they were walkers, they could walk downtown and often times they did. So, that's what really attracted them to this area. You know, then later on mama said that she liked hearing the fog horns and she liked hearing the train whistles. They lived here until they passed. They loved this area, the Golden Gate district. And I like that term, Golden Gate district.
05:20	**SM:** Why do you like the term Golden Gate district? **Joanne:** Well, first of all, that's what I know, that's what it's been and I don't think you necessarily need to change the name of a district. You know? I like the name Golden Gate district. For one thing, you can on a clear day, you can see the Golden Gate bridge, you know, you just walk out to the water. That's the name that's it's been and I don't think necessarily changing the name means anything and to some of the old timers it applies that it would be better if we called it NOBE. It would be a better district; it has a better sound; it's a better group of people, better economic

06:29	status and that doesn't go down well with a lot of the old timers. They really don't like it. When we first heard it it was like, what is that? North Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville. Yeah, we know, that's where we're situated. Yeah! North Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville. **SM:** How did you first hear about it? **Joanne:** I saw it on some kind of – I think I saw it in a real estate ad. And I thought NOBE, and I thought what does that mean. Then I started hearing it and finally I said to somebody, "What does that mean?" And they said, "Oh that's the North Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville area. And I thought, okay, those of us who've lived here know that's what it is, where we are. We are situated in those borderlines. So, why are we calling it NOBE, again? You know? And I never got really a good answer but a lot of us thought that it meant, okay, you're selling it as somehow or other as a different neighborhood and we just didn't like that very much. There was some comment on Next Door Neighbor about that. Some people thought it was perfectly alright and some folks said, "Yeah, but how long have you been here?" So, a lot of the old timers really didn't like it. **SM:** What about some of the recent changes that you've seen? What have you noticed and how do you feel about the changes? **Joanne:** Well, you know, the neighborhood is going back to what it used to be and it used to be predominantly Caucasian neighborhood with a few African Americans in it. You know, we got along. We didn't have a problem. We don't mind the changes

08:08	but we mind, for instance, there was a discussions on NextDoor Neighbor about the International Market and, you know what that is, right? International Market is over, if you go down Powell Street towards the water, you know, there's the shopping center on one side, the left hand side of the street and then on the right hand side of the street, if you make a turn by Lazy Boy and the gas station and wriggle your way, that's the International Market. Well, the International Market came in here, oh I don't know, it has to minimum – it might be longer than 20 years, and mom and I used to go over there, you know, and you would find some of the most unique things, you know, wool soap, you know, that kind of stuff. Sheet music, because we would buy it for my daughter. They had a little produce market, a little fish market and it was really nice and then we started getting the little restaurants in and it was a place that you could go. Your family could go and you didn't have to be dressed up and you could just get nice food, cheap food, reasonable price. Well, now we
09:13	understand that it's been sold and bought by somebody and the folks want to come in and bring – how was it put, one person put it, food I guess for the refined palate. And I thought, what? And I read it again and I talked to some of the old times and I said, "Did you see this? What does that mean?" And it's like, so what kinds of foods are you talking about? Well, we want international flavors. That's what you had. You had Vietnamese there; you had Greek; you had Korean food there; you had Chinese food. So, you already had an international mix, so, what are you talking about when you talk about international? So, there are more nationalities than of course Greek,

10:16	and Italian and all that but what are you saying. So, you are kicking people out who've been there who have supplied jobs and then your bringing in other people and the prices are going up because someone has already commented that the little Italian place, the lunch is about $20 as opposed to the person said they were able to get lunch for $10. So, that's not progress I don't think, number one. And I think that you insult people who have been there when you say things like when the people's tastes have refined in the past 15 years, I mean, come on. Because some of the foods that you're talking about are foods that a lot of us have been eating for years. You know, it may be new to you but it's not new to us. So, I think those are the changes and some people really don't like it because they're saying a lot of the people who have been here are getting pushed out. What they want is being ignored. Nobody has asked them if you want a bunch of café's with chairs outside. No one has asked that and that's nice but you might want to ask the people who've been here what they would like to see and what they're feeling is that they're not getting it.
11:23	**SM:** What do you think people who have been here would like to see? **Joanne:** I have no problem, for instance, with the International Market. I have no problem with it staying like that. Bring in some more nationalities, some more foods 'cause a lot of us would like to try foods from other cultures. We don't have a problem with that but I don't think you need to have every restaurant has to be the type where it is a little café, European type where you've got the little chairs. That's nice, but there are a lot of people who work and they work hard and they don't get a

12:12	chance to sit out and have lunch like that. And lunch time, they are just trying to get their lunch and get it in a timely fashion and get back to work so it's not likely that they're going to be just sitting there, you know, just sitting. **SM:** And you said that some people are feeling pushed out? **Joanne:** Well, yeah, because the prices of homes, for instance. It's just going through the roof and you've got some young people, my daughter was talking to another young man – they were born and raised here and they are talking about they can't afford – and they work and they can't afford the houses because they're saying when you start talking about $500,000, $600,000, it's too much, you know. They can't afford that and they are thinking, you know, none of the houses are worth that much to begin with and how come they have to be that high? So, if we want to buy a house then we'll have to go out of the community that we love that we really want to stay in. And they don't think that's fair and I don't think it's fair either. A lot of the younger people are just, you know, they live say in Hercules and all those places because that's where they can afford to go. They don't really like it and it's not really cheaper because if you buy a house for $300,000 in Hercules but you are spending hours getting back to your job and you work in San Francisco, that's not cost effective. You know, so those are the changes that people are seeing who have been here a really long time that they really do not like. We love our community. We want everybody to come in, but we'd like people to come in and get to know us first, get to know the community first before you start changing it because that may not be what
13:15	

	people want.
	SM: And how do you think people should get to know the community?
	Joanne: Well, first of all, when you come in you'd like to say hello to your neighbor.
13:55	That would be a starter, you know. Basically, just get to know them. I have had a neighbor who said to me, and I guess she's been in the neighborhood now maybe 20 years, and she said when she first moved in that people just kind of watched her first. She said "I wonder, why was that?" And I said 'They were watching you to see how you were going to react and what kind of neighbor you were going to be before they extended themselves." And so, she said "Finally." And it turned out the neighbor she was talking about was Mrs. Jackson, who is passed and she knew my family, you know, and she said she happened – I think she hurt her ankle or something and I think she was coming out of the house on crutches and she said this was the first time Mrs. Jackson had spoken to her and she said "You need to be careful coming down those stairs so you don't fall and hurt your other ankle." And "You need some
14:50	help?" And she said that was the first word she spoke to me and then she said "And then we started talking and I would cross the street, sit on her porch and talk to her." She said, "And she was delightful." And I said, "Yeah, that's all people have to do." And you will find that we're not that different and that people pretty much want the same things regardless to what they look like.
	SM: How have you met some of your neighbors?
	Joanne: Well, some of my neighbors I have, you know, I will look at them first and

15:47	some of them, many of them especially in (Inaudible), they walked over and said "Hi. We're the new neighbor." And then you can start talking. And then what we do on Arlington Avenue, we have the block parties in August, Hot August Nights. We have Christmas, we get together for Christmas and so everybody pitches in and they pot luck it. We keep abreast of what's going on in the neighborhood and so, for instance, there's going to be a Christmas party this year and so I have made sure that all of our neighbors know that there is going to be a Christmas party and we want to go. And it's just one block over. You can walk to it. You don't have to drive your car. That's pretty much the way I've met the neighbors. We have got a good group in our neighborhood. We have a good group and I think it's becoming more that way and I think that a lot of the people, especially the younger ones who've moved in who really want to be in the neighborhood, you know, and so that works out; that works so well. Then, of course, certain things are coming back. We noticed the revitalization of down San Pablo which we've waited for it for God knows how long.
16:55	You know, because we used to have a Safeway, which is where Gateway Market is. That used to be a Safeway store years ago. We had two drug stores. One was on one corner, which is where the dojo is and the other one is where the parking lot is for the ashram. You know, the building that is on if you are looking down on Stanford, the building that's on the left used to be a hotel. The building on the right used to be Strongs. You have fine clothes, the tailor was next door. Where the church is, Star Bethel, that used to be – there was a theatre and a bank there. Where there beauty supplies store is, that was a five and dime. So, we had all of that, you know, up and down San Pablo. So, it seems like it's starting to come back but the thing

	is, it's been so long, it took so many years for it to happen. A lot of the changes I see, I like. I like them and I think that the old timers will like it too.
	SM: Let's talk a little bit about what you remember from growing up in the neighborhood. What was the feeling in the community and how is it really different?
18:16	**Joanne:** Well, in those days, you know, no one locked their doors. You would close your door, go downtown, go to wherever shop, do whatever you wanted to do, come back, open your door and if you did lock your door you would throw your key under the doormat. And everybody was doing the same thing. So, everybody knew where the key was. We didn't have things like break-ins or that kind of – we just didn't have it.
	SM: Around what time did you notice that you had to start locking your doors?
	Joanne: We started locking both doors I guess like maybe, I would say like in the 80s, we started locking both doors. Because we would always, you know, have the front door locked but the back door was always unlocked. So, we would go through the back gate and enter the house and that was it. When it was warm we would just lock the storm door and leave the door open, you know. But we noticed around the 80s that maybe we better start locking up. There were times where I would forget to lock my car and leave the car unlocked and
19:35	come back and find everything where it was, you know. I know times have changed and it's not just Oakland. I don't subscribe to the fact that Oakland is the second most dangerous city in America. I don't believe it. Maybe they're looking at per capita because we're not as large as some cities. But to say that it is the most dangerous city in America, I don't think that is justice. I don't think so, not when you have places like New Orleans and Washington D.C. and Chicago. You know, I don't think so. But things have changed so you do have to be cautious and you do have to lock up and I understand that. But there was time when you didn't have

20:58	to worry about that. Maybe we'll get back to that at some time, at some point. **SM:** It was also mentioned to me, if you'd like to talk a little bit about this, that the people who lived here worked here? **Joanne:** Yeah. Many of the people did. You had the bakery. You had people who lived in the neighborhood and worked at the bakery; you had some people who worked at Strongs and you had the family who owned the drug stores who worked in the drug stores. And then, you know, you had people who, like my dad worked at the Naval Supply Center, but the transportation I think was better then. You could go out and flag a bus down at any time and get on it and ride to wherever you had to ride and that was it for a cheap, you know. So, you had a lot of people who lived in the area who worked either in the area or near the area. So, you didn't pay a lot of money for transportation at all. I can remember, you would by tokens, bus tokens and there would be five bus tokens I think for I don't know, a dollar or something like that, cheap. And you would get on top and toke it in and you got a transfer. You didn't have to pay for the transfer. That's the way it was.
22:14	**SM:** Around what time did you notice that shift happening? **Joanne:** I think it started shifting, I can remember that at one point you had a lot of women driving the buses and my parents told me later that that was because you had the second World War that just right on the heels Korea. And so you had a lot of women who took places of the men, and so they were driving busses and then I remember vaguely that after a while you didn't see very many women driving the busses and my parents said that was because the men were coming back and so they were taking the jobs back. So, I guess I would say that started changing maybe around, I think a lot of the changes started around the 80s. I think a lot of the changes started around the 80s. Then, of course, there are some

	people who say that happened because you had the cocaine epidemic and so that changed a lot of things. Changed a lot of people's lives. So, I kind of think the 80s you started seeing a lot of changes in the 80s.
23:30	**SM:** Let's talk also about when you were a little girl and you were telling me some memories, really fond memories that you had of playing with other kids in the neighborhood. Can you talk a little bit about the life of a kid?
	Joanne: Yeah, our block never had a lot of children so just a few children, you know. But you played together and, of course, you know, Golden Gate, the recreation center that's there, you know, especially in the summers, you would go up to the recreation center and they had all kinds of activities, kick ball and all that stuff and the Scotland's, Mr. Scotland was the first recreation director there at Golden Gate. As a matter of fact, one of his daughters is in church right now, Suki, that's her nickname. So, he was the first director there and so he knew our family and all that and we all grew up together. So, we would walk up to Golden Gate for the longest, where there is, just before you get to the field, the Golden Gate field there is a little, small building there that I think is glass, or something like that. And then you have the open-air market, like flea market that's next door. That's little small building that's in between used to be Rudy's and at Rudy's you could go in there with a nickel and you could buy a big pickle, sour pickle and then for a penny you bought the peppermint stick. And my mother had taught me how to eat it and of course you put a hole in the pickle and you put
25:05	the peppermint stick in it. And so you'd bite off the peppermint stick and as you bit, and I was a little girl and it seems like it was that long. The pickle seemed like it was that big, and you would put it in there and bite off it and when you get down to the pickle then you would start eating pickle and peppermints. And so, I would have my little allowance and so I would

26:20	save my little money because I could walk home, you know. And then I loved lemon custard ice cream and for a nickel you could get a scoop of lemon custard ice cream in a cone. It would be either the pickle or the lemon custard ice cream and that's what I would eat on my way home. And she had all kinds of little knickknacks for kids. So you didn't stop on the way to school. That was a no-no. But coming home, you could stop and get your little snacks and then walk home. Then you would be at home. People looked out for children so my mother – my dad didn't believe that women should work and when she first came to California they did not have African American teachers, per se. So she was a assigned though; she'd already taught 15 years but she was assigned to preschool. So, my dad thought, no, she needs to be home taking care of the house and the children so he worked. So, mama was always home for me but then there were a few children who we called latch key kids. So, mama might not be home as soon as they got home, but the neighbors were home and of course, we had police officers that really knew where every kid lived. So, if I went one block passed my street there would be a police officer who'd say, "Joanne Allen, I think you live on Arlington Avenue. And I know that your parents don't know that you're on 57th Street, so back to the street I would go. And your mom knew before you got home. Those were the things that changed. You know, that neighbors really looked out for children. And I don't recall hearing anything like – you know, now you hear that children are missing. I don't recall hearing much of that. As a matter of fact, I don't recall hearing anything like that and the only time I remember hearing something like that was there was a little girl, I remember her name was Stephanie. That was, oh I don't even think I was eight years-old. She'd gone missing and it was all over the papers and people were just worried, how could this happen. That was the only case that I knew of. So, we felt that we were relatively safe. We didn't hang out in the

29:01	street because our parents ran the house. So, if mama said that you had to be in by a certain time then you had to be in by a certain time, it was just that. That's just the way it was. So, dark didn't catch you outside. You were inside. And then, of course, you had backyards where you played, so there wasn't a lot of running up and down the street and being four blocks away and nobody knowing where you were. You were in your backyard. My mother used to say, I guess that was before they coined the term *bussing the kids*, she would bus kids to the house because she would, okay, these are the kids you're going to play with. Okay. Because I know their mothers and their mothers watch out for their kids, and bla, bla, bla. And so these will be your playmates. My playmates were handpicked. I think a lot of mothers did that. It was just a different time. It was a different time. We enjoyed – you know, there were so much recreation centers were closing, they were open so we had all sorts of things to do. **SM:** What about the diversity of the neighborhood? **Joanne:** The neighborhood was pretty much a few African Americans, mostly Caucasians; the interesting thing is that after a while you saw more and more African Americans, people moved out. My parents always said it was a shame that people moved out that it seemed that as more African Americans moved in, people just moved out. They thought it was a shame. That shouldn't have had anything to do with anything. But it did happen, and so for a long time you had mostly African Americans in the neighborhood who hung in there. Of course, like I say, now things are changing and it is going back to what it was. To people who are new, they think, oh, but no. This is the way it was. It is nothing new. It is just going back to the way it was.
30:35	**SM:** What about the library? What do you remember about the Golden Gate Library?

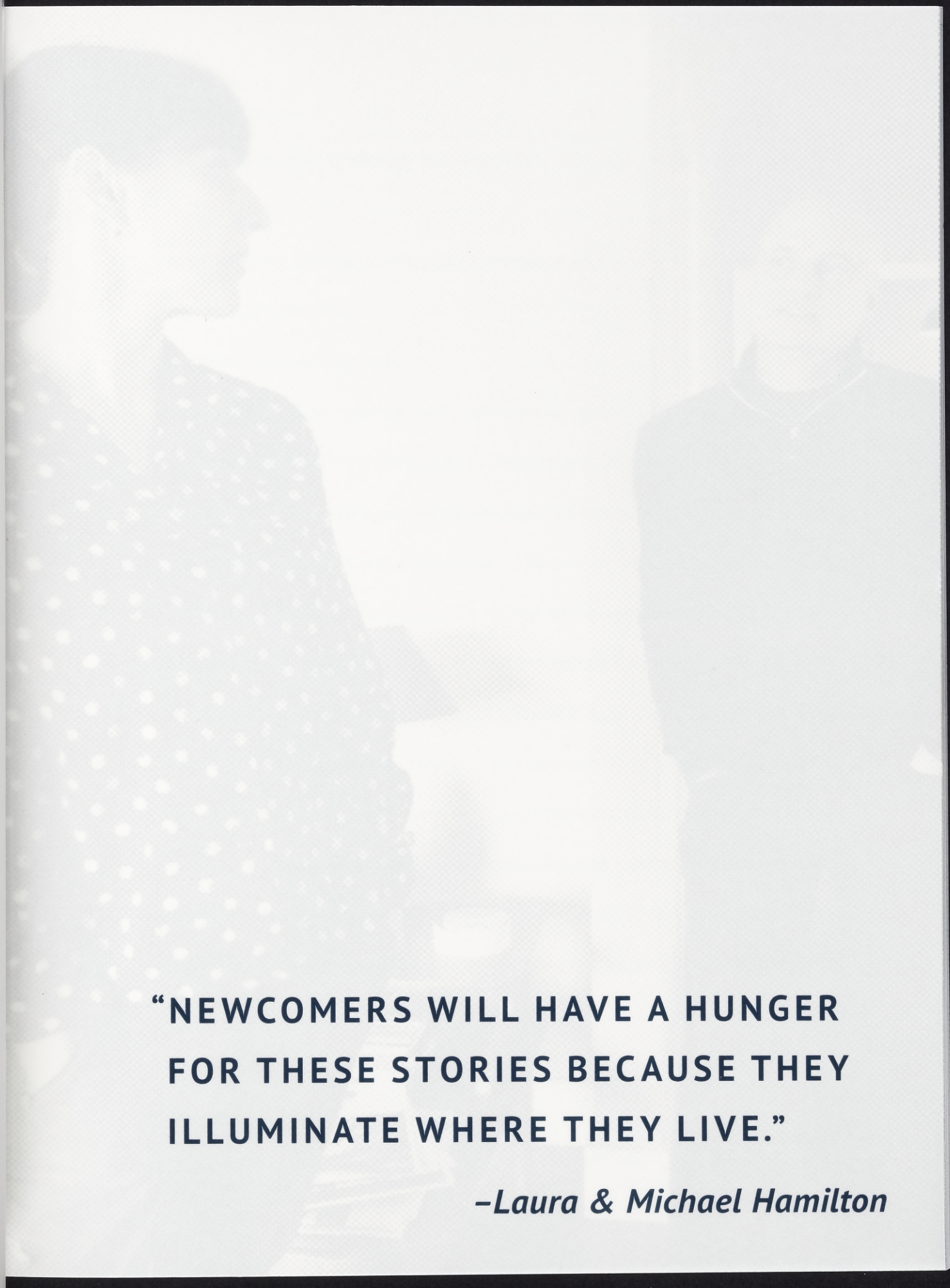
	Joanne: That was – oh, a lot of time we spent in that library. My mom used to always say that you should always read and you should always have a book with you because she said that one day you may open it and discover some wonders between the covers. So, that was one place that I was always going to be. It pretty much looks the same way it did when I was a little girl. So, I had my library card and there were just, it seemed like there were just thousands and thousands of books. It's a small library, but you know, when you are small everything seems to be big. So, it seemed it was the biggest library in the world. There were a lot of cultural events that went on there. It was a community meeting place just like it is now. So, that hasn't changed. **SM:** Do you remember a time when it was closed? **Joanne:** A lot of the old timers were not happy with that because they figured why in the
31:49	world would you close the library. You know, and of course you heard things like, well it wasn't getting used much, and all of that. **SM:** Do you remember around what year this was? **Joanne:** I am trying to remember when that was. I think a lot of the changes were basically in the 80s. And we just couldn't believe that they would shut that library. It had been there forever. It was just a beautiful old building, the architecture – the whole thing, so it was like, why don't you save it. And if you're going to be closing up all of these library's, after while you're not going to have a library in the communities, which was another thing my mother found fascinating. That there was a library just walking distance from the house. **SM:** What do you remember about the Lasartemays and their collection? **Joanne:** My mother would have been really the one to talk to, but I do know that they were responsible for obtaining a lot of the histories, especially from African American point of

	view. The fact that many came here during the war for better jobs, better opportunities, better life and stayed. So, it was always their concern that people need to hear the story. They need to hear about these people who left their homes, really not knowing what they were going to find.
	SM: How did it impact the neighborhood that the Lasartemays' collection was at the Golden Gate? Do you remember people talking about going there to look at the collection or to attend events that they had?
33:28	**Joanne:** And people did. You know, they went. Maybe not lots, and lots, and lots of people, but people did go and they did view the collection and they did attend the cultural events there. It was a library, you know, the fact that to us saying that it is not being used very much didn't go over very well because it was being used. Now, when people say something is not being used, I mean I don't know what they are talking about. Are you talking about how many people use it? Are you talking about thousands of people using it, like the main library downtown, or are you talking about a smaller number because, after all, this is just a neighborhood so you're not going to get thousands of people necessarily using that library, but it should be here and the community does use it and we want it to stay. We were excited that they were able to save it.
34:06	**SM:** Well, I think we've kind of covered all the things we've talked about. Is there anything else that you feel like is missing?
	SM: Okay. I think you're doing a great job and I think that it's important that people know -- a neighborhood know a neighborhood. I think people will have a better appreciation and they'll want to come and they'll want to stay; that's the other thing that some of the old timers talk about. People come into a neighborhood then stay five years and then they're

35:00	gone. It is like, wouldn't you like to stay a little longer than that and become really a part of the neighborhood so that you can not only see changes but you can help bring about changes. You know, I mean if you're going to just come in and fly out, then, you know, then you're gone and you know, and whatever change you did make, you know, goes with you. And really that's how you have a lot of neighborhoods where they've kind of fallen on hard times. This is my great-great grandmother who was born in Guinea West Africa and when she was 11 and her sister was 12, they were kidnapped and brought to America. We don't know their real names. Somehow or other that didn't come down to us. But they gave them the name of Heady and Delphi. Those weren't their real names, but that was it.
	SM: How did she come to have a photograph?
36:18	**Joanne:** Isn't that interesting? And I was asking my mom, I said "How did she manage to get a photograph?" Apparently, she lived long enough where they had those, not cameras like this, but the kind where you know *poof* you know, that kind of thing. So, they were able to take a picture of her when photography was new. I was really shocked. This is my great grandmother, she's the daughter of great, great grandma. That's my uncle. She says that when peace was declared, which was the end of the civil war, she was 12. So we figure you subtract 12 from 1865, and we figure she was probably born around 1853. The interesting thing is, we're not quite sure, and I've been doing research to see if I can find – it's difficult finding ship's records. You can find the, but most of the descriptions are 11 year-old – and I did find some 11, 12 year-old girls. I don't know if these are the girls, you know, but that's the only description that you find so I don't know if those were the girls and if that was the ship. But I do know, it was interesting because England was running blockades against slavery. So, I am just guessing as to when she would have actually come here. The other

38:55	interesting thing is that she came directly here from West Africa and came in through Portsmouth, Virginia. Instead of being dropped off at one of the islands and, you know, so she came directly here, she and her sister. My great grandmother, Julie, and then this is my grandmother, Isabella. This is her daughter. She had three children, two boys, and a girl and my mom was the girl. And of course my uncle, there were two boys. Her parents died when she was three years-old. They were both gone by the time she was three years-old. So, she was born in Opelousas and they promised that my great grandmother to her mother was that she would, as long as she lived she would live for her children and she wanted her children educated and she promised that she would get them an education. There were no universities in Opelousas so she decided to go New Orleans which was against everything the men in the family believed. Her sons were totally against that. She didn't listen and so she and – she was a widow, so she and my great aunt took the three children and moved to New Orleans. Then they were educated in New Orleans University which is now called Dillard. It is now Dillard University but at the time it was New Orleans University. So, they were educated there. This is my mom, Lillian. My mom and dad met here in Oakland, actually. That's my dad. Then, of course, they got married, and that's me. Then I got married and this is my daughter. So, I believe that's six generations of us counting my daughter as a baby of course. This is my dad and me as a baby. This is me standing on our porch and, this is my dad again at holiday time. We loved the holidays.
40:45	**SM:** Can I take this card out? Can you just show it over the other picture and say what it is? **Joanne:** Yes. This is, it's called Mesan Blanc Club Plan and this is in New Orleans. This is my great aunt, the widowed great aunt who came with my widowed great grandmother to New Orleans. And apparently she bought something, some furniture or something or other, and

	anyway, it costs – the year is 1927, and she paid on installment and it was $6.00 and $3.00. It's amazing.
41:50	**(Audio Ends)**



"NEWCOMERS WILL HAVE A HUNGER FOR THESE STORIES BECAUSE THEY ILLUMINATE WHERE THEY LIVE."

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PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Laura & Michael Hamilton, 2015

Photo by Sue Mark

	marksearch_Laura & Michael Hamilton 1/21/2015 Video Transcript
	Sue Mark: I would love to start by having you each say your name.
	Laura: Laura Hamilton.
	Michael: Michael Hamilton.
	SM: And we can just go from right where we were talking. How did you come to this neighborhood? How did you come to the Golden Gate?
00:17	**Laura:** Well, as we were just saying, Michael had been living in Rockridge and we started dating and this was close, going on three years ago. So, he had been living in Rockridge for six months or so. We started dating and we decided to move in together and actually found a house right around the corner. When we got to the point when we decided to buy something it was kind of the classic tale of we knew we wanted to stay in Oakland but trying to find an area where honestly we could afford things. So, our search took us through Temescal and Bushrod and a little further over in Longfellow and Santa Fe, and this was a completely new area to both of us. But that was the kind of thing where we loved the house and then before we had even closed on it we started meeting the neighbors and they were welcoming from the beginning. So, when we realized this house was a block away from the Donut Farm, it sort of in his mind became the reason why we had to buy the house.
01:32	

	Michael: We had to name houses with little nicknames because, you know, after you see four, five, ten houses they all begin to blur a bit. So, you know, there's the yellow and white linoleum house, or there was the trailer home house, because it was long and narrow and this was the donut house because it was close to the Donut Farm.
	SM: How did your realtor promote the neighborhood to you?
	Michael: I don't think that she had done much work in this specific neighborhood. She was more familiar with the Santa Fe, Longfellow area and had a lot to say about how active the community groups were there. She was also familiar with Place down on San Pablo and 63rd, or whatever that is. So, I think that this area is very similar to Longfellow and Santa Fe. The distinction is mostly imaginary. I think one of the first things she talked about was the active community groups in this part of the city. Does that jive with your memory as well?
	Laura: I think so.
	Michael: Which proved to be true. We certainly have seen that.
02:38	**SM:** And when you were deciding to purchase the house, what did you learn about the neighborhood?
	Laura: Did we learn about some of the historical aspects of it before we moved in or was it really –
	Michael: The only history was sort of classic real estate. Let's say it was built in the early part of the 20th century, so it's built with redwood, and that's about it. There

	wasn't much of an introduction to the culture, or the history, or anything. **Laura:** We did know about the neighbors on either side of us have been here, what, 30 to 40 years and so we knew that the woman who had owned this house that it had been a family house, that she had been here 30 to 50 years. So, we just picked up on that sense that this was definitely a neighborhood in transition.
03:19	**Michael:** And, actually, the real estate, the developer who did the house was jokingly, and later turned out to be very accurately reporting to us that the neighbors on both sides had come over and given him a stern talking to about wanting to be sure that he sold the house to a good person. And he told that to us and we figured that's just part of the stick, ya know. Well, the neighbors are really looking out for each other. But independently they have both come back over the last year and told us, you know, "When that man was over there fixing up your house, we told him that we wanted good people moving in here." So, I think that they took a great deal of personal investment in making sure that they had a good neighbor. It wasn't like, oh, who is going to move in now. **Laura:** Yeah. This house had been rented for a while before it was sold to the developer and I think there were some neighbors in here who had a lot of parties, had loud music and so the women on either side of the house had this direct experience with not having good neighbors and did not want that. **Michael:** Yeah. They didn't want a repeat of that experience. **SM:** And so, you said you started to get to know people before you purchased the

	house or before you –
	Laura: Em Hmm.
04:40	**SM:** -- moved in?
	Laura: I think we did go ahead and put an offer in on the house but even in that period of waiting we would come drive by, you know, we were excited about it so we would come check out the house again, "Let's go look again." And the neighbors started coming by and in their minds we had already bought the house and so "Oh, welcome to the neighborhood. We're so happy to have you here." I think Dale and Dan were maybe the first people we met.
	Michael: I think Deborah. Remember? We were sitting in front of the house and the woman next door, she grew up there, she saw us sitting there and probably wondered, who were these people? And she came up and was like "So, hi. What's going on," just sort of a friendly, who are you. And when we told her that we were thinking about moving into the house she just lit up and she was very welcoming and she told us who she was. I think we felt a little nervous because we hadn't actually closed on the house yet and so there was still a chance it wasn't going to
05:23	happen. People were walking up to us and talking to us immediately, like I said, before we moved in.
	SM: Both white and black people?
	Laura: Em hmm.
	Michael: Definitely. Yeah. We very quickly got to know Deborah. Dale and Dan

	knocked on our door practically the day we were moving in. They had a welcome kit for us. They are the captains of the local neighborhood block club so they were very eager to welcome us with information and getting us on the mailing list, and making sure we knew that there was an active community organization.
	SM: Can we talk a little bit about what this block club is, what you know about it?
	Laura: You might know more about it and its origins than I do.
	Michael: Well, I think its background is it was a neighborhood watch.
	Matt Dibble (videographer): We have to include the question in your response
06:15	because Sue will be cut out later.
	Michael: The neighborhood block club was originally a neighborhood watch organization and I believe that that was started up probably 10-ish years ago. I think that they're, from what I've heard, there's some community pushback on what the neighborhood watch program meant. It felt like a bit of a police state intrusion into the neighborhood. The logo is this big eye and it does have sort of an ominous air to it. So, I think that the neighborhood watch idea wasn't the problem, it was just the way it was branded and packaged felt a little intrusive. So, the organization changed its name and spirit a bit to be more community based and less about anti-crime and more about building partnerships, and friendships, and relationships in the community.
	Laura: And we have been told, Dale and Dan have told us the initial idea was that they would be the 61st Street block club that would take care of this particular

	stretch. Their hope was that a 62nd Street block club would develop and a 63rd Street block club, and it sounds like that never got off the ground. And the 61st Street block club has morphed into more of a community organization that goes beyond safety issues. So, we're seeing neighbors from other blocks become a part of it.
07:51	**Michael:** I think some of it has been formal. It's a club by name, but it kind of sounds like there should be a clubhouse and a secret handshake, but there's nothing like that. They worked with one of the city council members and had trees planted along here about five, six years ago and there's been more informal. That was more of a formal project. I think there's been informal work. For example, the apartment complex across the street from us, I believe, they're absentee landlords. It is a low rent apartment building and there was a lot of riff raff happening and Dale and Dan who head that club, along with our two neighbors, sort of physically went out and confronted people who were coming and going in the middle of the night and causing a ruckus. I can see Dale and Dan doing it. I wish I had been around to see Mrs. Ella out there with her cane, you know, shaking at them "Don't come around and cause trouble in my neighborhood." She is a force to be contended with. But they informally shook the place clean of its riff raff and Dale and Dan have sort of taken responsibility for making sure that the people coming in are respectable citizens. One of our neighbors, her son moved in there. So, they took what was a magnet

09:17	for problems on the block and without putting it under the agent of, you know, this is a neighborhood watch project, they all sort of banded together and put a concerted effort on changing the reality around that complex, which it's nothing to look at these days but it's quiet. The people that come and go from there are nice people. It's amazing because it is something as simple as sort of standing up to the chaos of a low rent apartment building, isn't something that you can solve with public property. You can't solve that with a mural. You can't just shake your fists at it. You really have to get hand on hand. It's hand on hand combat with the chaos. You have to go out there and scare away the riff raff and take ownership of it. People in this immediate area have done, and so that place isn't a problem. We've never experienced that as a problem and we've heard stories that it was pretty grim for quite a few years. So, we're fortunate that they did that. That laid the groundwork for us to have a nice, quiet, safe neighborhood to live in. In terms of the history of the 61st Street block club, I think there have been a few formal things that the club has worked on, from the street trees to the mural and art at the end of the block. But I think that there's a more subtle and perhaps more powerful benefit, which is that they get people talking and we meet every other month usually at Down's Memorial Church. But we've actually started going to people's homes now and it is a pot-luck with no particular agenda. **SM:** How many people usually come?

	Laura: It can range anywhere from a dozen to 20.
10:57	**Michael:** Well, the one we had at Jo Jo's was 30-35. So it was fairly significant.
	Laura: I think they are starting to grow in size. I think word is getting out a little bit more. Sue had asked earlier about how we communicate about these things and we recognize that not everybody in the area is online, or even has a computer so it has definitely been a combination of pushing the word out next door and by email but then going around, particularly to the people we absolutely know don't have access to computers, knocking on their door and saying, "Hey. This is happening on this date. Please come." So, we're making an effort to reach sort of everybody.
	SM: Can you describe to me who you typically see at the meeting in terms of the range of people who are there, young, old, black, white, new, long-term?
	Laura: It is a pretty mixed crowd I think. The people who attend are – it's a range of ages, range of old timers of the neighborhood and new home-owners and renters. A couple of women who have – I think Georgia's been in the neighborhood
11:58	the longest, African American woman who has lived here since 1965. I don't remember how long Marylyn has been here.
	Michael: About as long.
	Laura: About as long. Marylyn is retired and lives on her own, white woman. Yeah, it's really nice that it's not just all the newcomers to the neighborhood. Anybody who has been here from 50 years to 6 months.
	Michael: I should just throw in for mix, we have a retired couple down the street,

	they're a Vietnamese couple. They're immigrants. So, they're newcomers but they are not young, new family type either. The diversity stretches beyond just black and white as well.
	SM: What happens during the meeting? What do people talk about?
	Michael: It varies. I've been to a few that you haven't been able to get to. I think the majority of the conversation is informal. People are – you know, it's like a lot of things where you see people and you're just passing them by and you wave, but then you finally have 30 or 40 minutes to sit and eat some pizza next to them or
13:16	you get to chat a little bit about, oh did you see what they're doing in that backyard, or you know, some of it is neighborhood stuff and some of it is just sharing stories. I think the older people have found themselves with enrapt audience, wanting to hear stories about the past so Georgia will tell stories or Marylyn will tell stories about what things used to be like, or even Dale and Dan, you know, they've been here 25 years. They'll tell a story. So, I think people kind of have a hunger for these, the newcomers will have a hunger for these stories because it illuminated where they live and even the old timers appreciate hearing these stories because sometimes they're stories they haven't heard themselves, or it's a different version of the story that they lived through.
	SM: What's a memorable story that you can think of?
	Michael: I remember Marylyn talking about moving here from – I wish I could remember where she moved here from, but apparently some very nice, lush

14:39	neighborhood and she moved here in the 70s and she was a little bit struck by the neighborhood being more of a working class neighborhood without a lot of fancy homes and fancy lawns. I don't remember what it is that made her buy the house but she decided she was going to buy this house and it was going to be a good investment for her. And she talks about how she felt, like she had to get used to being in the neighborhood, like "This is where I live now. I guess I am not going to complain about it. It's up to me to make it a more welcoming, please neighborhood." But what struck me about the story is that in some ways it mirrors our own experience which is we were first struck when we were driving around and visiting this neighborhood to like "Oh, there aren't a lot of trees" and we had moved from a part of Oakland where it is all tree lined streets and we thought wow, okay, so this maybe isn't as visually appealing as the neighborhood we came from, but like Marylyn, we quickly realized that there was a lot more happening than meets the eye. The first impression that you might get is one part of the story but then even spending just a few hours, as I would do sometimes between weekends when you were working; I work at home so I had some extra time. I would go to visit the neighborhoods where the houses were that we were looking at and stroll. And all of my preconceptions about a neighborhood on what we'd seen on a Sunday afternoon were usually wiped by a different set of understandings of what that neighborhood was like because if you just drive in and look at a neighborhood, you

15:53	might take a snapshot and draw some conclusions about what that neighborhood is like but once you hit the pavement with your feet and you say hi to some people on the sidewalk, or you see someone on their porch and say "How's it going" and they're instantly chatting with you, you get a very different view of it. I think Marylyn's story from 30 – 40 years ago mirrors that. That she had a somewhat similar experience. I can't speak for her but my sense was that she came to this neighborhood, had sort of a visual snapshot of what it was like and thought "Oh, my. What have I done?" But then she has been an extremely active member in this community. She is loved by everybody and she loves the neighborhood. She always talks about she's going nowhere and she'll leave her house feet first. She's a hardcore Golden Gate woman. **SM:** Do people at this block club, do they talk about the changes that have happened in the last five years, and what have you heard about that? **Michael:** I think that is not as much as I'd like. I think there's a little bit – everyone will acknowledge that things are changing a lot. That's a safe zone to say yeah, things are changing a lot. But then past that people aren't really –
17:10	**Laura:** Yeah, people aren't really going into detail about what it is that they see with the changes. I think it's this unspoken – kind of an unspoken and, I don't know if I am reading into it how much people may or may not be concerned about this idea of gentrification which can have, I think, some multilayered things with a lot of different meanings. But I always wonder if that's the unspoken. That they're not

	quite – well, everything is changing. Is that a good thing that it's changing or not? **Michael:** I think, to be very frank, I think what we are aware of that it could be very much affected by the fact that we in some ways represent, or look like the gentrification that people are worried about. We're younger; we're half white have mixed, and so people probably approach us with a certain point of view. On the other hand, we're also not dragging around in super expensive cars and, you know, living some sort of lavish lifestyle. So, I think we also defeat the gentrification stereotype of kind of brash, insensitive outsiders with no regard to what's happening in the neighborhood. So, I think in some ways we make look like the problem but we don't act like it. You're looking at me like you don't quite buy that. **Laura:** I think it goes back to the idea that gentrification can mean a lot of different
18:20	things. I think we come to it with a certain idea of what we think gentrification is, so the idea that somebody, that a couple that may be coming in, representing gentrification are – don't necessarily care about the community and they are sort of insensitive to things going on and I wonder, is there still an aspect of gentrification of people who are committed to being involved in their community, but then what does that involvement mean and what does that look like? It is like, Michael and I talk a lot about the fact that there are so few trees on our block, for example. When the block club was working on getting trees planted along here, there were, actually, the neighbors on either side of us were very resistant. They did not want trees put out on their front stoops.

	SM: Did they say why? **Laura:** We haven't been able to go in and ask why so we don't know exactly why. But it goes to that question of why? Somebody is giving you a tree and why are you resistant to it? So, I think it's even that idea, like, we want to put trees on the streets to make the neighborhood look better. Do some people view that as
19:46	gentrification? **Michael:** And we've heard that some people do view that. That greening is just a symbol of gentrification which, you know, if you look at data you can say, sure, the correlation between trees and landscaping is strongly correlated with wealth, then if you have concerns about economic gentrification, you can sort of see how they begin to bleed together and they could be resistant but it's not about data. It's about impressions and stereotypes I think. I think that one of the things that we've spent a fair bit of time talking about as a couple and with the people that we work with on the neighborhood projects is that they're approached to solving problems in some ways represents I guess a certain culture or a point of view that might be different than what other people are used to around here. Even having the luxury of time to sit back and stroke your chin, and think about should we have street trees or should we paint a mural on that blighted warehouse corner, represents a certain degree of – it's a point of view, you know? That if you have time to do that then you've achieved a certain level of comfort or security that other people might be like "Hey, I am working" or "I've got other issues I've

21:05	got to cope with. I can't sit around and have the luxury of time to worry about how nice the trees are on the street." So, we sort of found that even some of our interests in being active, contributing participants may in some ways represent one part of the gentrification puzzle just by being out there going "Hey, let's change things" because change itself is threatening and represents, in some ways represents either a rejection or a dismissal of the way things have been. To whatever extent, the way things have been is what you're used to or what you have owned, or what is yours, then of course, that's a threat or a conflict of some sort even if it's just an existential conflict and not a personal one.
22:20	**Laura:** Yeah, I always find it interesting talking about the mural up the street. So, there's a stretch of 61st Street, a block, 61st Street place between Baker and Lowell that has long been an area for dumping. RVs park there and live there. There's a warehouse on either side, so one, the building owner has the business so he's actively on flight (0:23:20.5). The other one, it's rentals, and the block club has been working now on trying to clean that up, get the RVs out of there. One of the building owners has agreed to put some lighting up and what I find interesting is Georgia, this one neighbor who has been here for 50 years, when we started talking about it she said "Oh. That's been going on for as long as I've been here and we've tried in the past to clean that up and it has never ever worked." So, she was on one hand very dismissive of the whole thing and on the other hand is right back there with us trying to get it changed. So, there I think is a – it's interesting to me

	that it's just somebody who seems to feel pretty hopeless about it and you would think that if somebody is feeling hopeless, she wouldn't bother getting involved again and yet she's there; she still has this hope that it can change.
23:20	**Michael:** Yeah. Actually, Georgia has been around for just about every event. We did a big neighborhood walk around with a class from UC Berkeley; we did a big event with the Mayor; we did a design charrette and she's been there. She comes to the monthly things. Despite, perhaps, seeing efforts come and go, she is like "Well, let's try it again." She brings her experience to it which is useful. Although, she is learning things too. Someone talked about how Lowell Street used to be a Santa Fe railroad corridor and she vaguely knew that. I think it may have been Dan who was talking about when they decommissioned the railroad and changed it back into a roadway. He and – Dan and someone else, I think at the holiday party we're talking about some of the history of converting it to a street and she hadn't heard that or she had been vaguely aware of it and was curious about how it used to be blocked off and now it wasn't. So, even here is an old timer who comes to these meetings. You ask what we talk about at these meetings, everyone still finds
24:24	material for knowing something new about their neighborhood no matter how long they've lived here. One thing I want to say too about the gentrification, 'cause this is something we feel every month, is we have a house that got painted before we bought it. You know, it got painted and fixed up outside so it looks distinct in some ways from our

	neighbors whose houses were built simultaneously and share a floor plan and everything, and there's a For Sale sign out front and it went on the market at a very public price and got sold at a public price and, you know, our neighbors bought their homes 30 – 40 years ago for a tiny fraction of what the houses on this street sell for now and there's no secret about it. I think that there's this incredible disparity with how the economy has grown over the, say last 50 years, and what real estate prices have done in the last 50 years. It creates a massive perceived gap in what it means to own a house on this street.
25:19	So, as people who can afford a house in a half million dollar house range, living next to people who may have paid a quarter of a tenth of that, you know, it creates, I think it creates a false impression of wealth because, of course, not only have the prices of the houses gone up, but everything else has sort of escalated at a similar pace. Whereas, the people who are in some ways lucky enough to buy a house back in the 60s, 70s, or 80s they sort of walked into home ownership at a time when it was no more affordable probably than it is now, it's just that proportionately speaking the numbers look smaller. So, someone says, "Oh wow. You know, I can't believe your house sold for $500 - $600,000." What you can't really explain in those kind of situations is that, well, yeah, but that is like the cheapest house in the Bay Area now just like when you bought your house it was probably proportionately speaking about the same price. But if you paid $50,000 for your house and your neighbor paid $600 – something

	for a house, of course you're going to think wow, this neighborhood is just going bananas. But that kind of proportionality sort of, I think, adds to the perception of – it adds something to a perception. I guess I don't quite even know what it is.
	SM: Well, you had said, and maybe you want to repeat this – I don't know if you're comfortable with it, but you had said to me: "I have these feelings about gentrification, people who buy in this neighborhood are mostly modest, not very wealthy. A true middle class community is missing. What used to be middle class in
27:05	the past is not the same now. Old and new middle class are different."
	Michael: Yeah. I think – so there's a story in today's New York Times saying how half our country's wealth will be controlled by the vilified one percent, you know, just in a few years. I think that we all have, if you've been paying any attention to the news at all, watched how this idea of an income gap or wealth gap is just expanding exponentially, and so there is in my uneducated view, I am not an economist, but there's this huge gap between being wealthy and being poor and there's really nothing in the middle. You know, you hear it all the time from politicians, the disappearing middle class, but here in a neighborhood that's a traditionally working class, middle class neighborhood that giant gap is in some ways really laid bare because we are, I would say we're of relatively modest means. Neither of us are fabulously rich. We work really hard to make mortgage every month and so it's not like we're living a life of financial luxury, and yet by
28:21	comparison to people in this neighborhood, as I was saying, people look at the

	price of the house and reasonably make assumptions about how much wealthier we might be given that they bought their house at a different time and the house was so much less expensive. But the truth is that we fall at the very bottom end of the home buyer market and we couldn't afford to live in a bigger house or in a nicer neighborhood, and I put big quotes around "nicer." So, I guess I am rambling a bit. I guess my point about the disappearing middle class, like is there a middle class? It's sort of like if you are super rich and you are living in the hills on a large multi-thousand square foot lot, that's one thing and then there's kind of everybody else. Unfortunately, if you look at it from a data point of view, or from a big picture point of view that really shows how everyone is really clustered down at the bottom of the economic scale and then day to day existence, it still feels like there's gaps and differences but proportionately speaking, those differences are small in the big picture. I don't think I am saying this very articulately. Don't use any of this.
29:43	**Laura:** The thing that complicates it is that fact that we're dealing with the Bay Area, right. Anywhere else, if we lived anywhere else outside of the Bay Area and we were able to be making what we make, for one thing we wouldn't have paid – we would've had an enormous house. You know, we wouldn't have had to pay this what we pay for this. But you look at, you know, we're fortunate. Our salaries together are far beyond the average salary. Is it the average, or is it the median salary for middle class in the United States?

	Michael: The median income in our zip code, I'll just sound like I know what I am talking about, is $38,000.
	Laura: So, that's even in our zip code. So, and I think about people that I interact with at work and I work in San Francisco, you know, these people are upper middle class but they're still not the one percent. They're not the wildly wealthy group of
30:48	people that everybody thinks of when they think of the wealthy, the upper class, so to speak. They're able to send their kids to college; probably both parents work and they are able to take a nice vacation. I work with the San Francisco Symphony so they have disposable income to come to the symphony but they're not making millions. So, I just always think of how the Bay Area tends to really skew how we look at things. So, you and I feel like, gosh, we're barely scraping by, how is it? But then you point out, median income in our neighborhood is actually less than the rest of the country.
	Michael: It kind of comes to proportionality because someone who bought a house say, 40 years ago and paid $25,000 for it and either they've paid off their mortgage or if they are paying a mortgage it is probably enviably small by our standards, you know, their costs of living -- the biggest cost of living around here is
31:46	housing, rent or mortgage. So, for them they are sinking a much smaller proportion of their income, whatever it is, to their housing. We pay, by most standards a disproportionately high amount of our income just to pay for a roof over our heads. So, that creates already an imbalance of comparing personal economics.

	The other thing I was going to say is that, you know, we also have a lot of people in our neighborhood that are fixed income seniors and so that really makes that median income number a little bit weird as a point of comparison or as a standard because, you know, are you going to really line up sort of and compare a middle aged working couple against a senior, either individual or a couple who are on social security? To describe their economic reality side by side is a little weird in some ways just because, of course, they're not going to have in 2015 the same kind of income.
33:02	I am not sure what my point is except that we have here, I guess the reality is we have people who are living in an old economy and a new economy living side by side. The old economy people aren't, I think, unsurprisingly looking at new economy people. And I am not just talking about young, techy millionaires, just people who are in today's dollars and cents probably not much different than they were 30 – 40 years ago but the actual numbers are so far apart that it creates, just inevitably creates a gap even if lifestyle and overall material wealth isn't that different, it just looks different. It's like there's the Big Mac economy, right? Like, how much money does it take to buy a Big Mac in different parts of the world? In the United States, let's say a Big Mac costs a dollar and in South Africa that Big Mac might cost 85 cents, or in India it's 23 cents. So, the Big Mac economy is right in our own neighborhood, just from how much money people are spending each month to put a roof over their head, even though the houses are about the same and the

	neighborhood is exactly the same. The numbers are so different. We can ramble to some other topic, if you don't mind.
	SM: (Inaudible) it's very relevant to understand what does change mean and what does gentrification mean and how are people understanding. You brought something up when we met last week about how you were personally trying to find out about local history and what that experience was like. Can you talk about that again?
	Michael: Yeah. I think we both can because we've both been, you know, hungry to learn. One of the things that I was immediately interested in just as a new home
34:48	buyer, was photographs of the neighborhood and this house in particular because we knew it was 100 – something years old and we were kind of curious to see if there was any archive about people on the block that might have pictures from the past. We didn't find too many but through good people, yourself included, we've sort of learned a little bit about the archives at the open museum and we've begun to see a few things. But it has been tough to find any documentary evidence of what the neighborhood was like other than a few random photos from the general area. So, I am talking about anything from 61st Street, regrettably.
	SM: What was the process like? What did you do to try to find pictures?
	Michael: Well, for me this was a very quick lesson in remembering that because I am, you know, sort of a tech savvy person in the modern economy, you know, I
35:59	started putting out messages on the neighborhood email list and NextDoor and I

	got some good information that way, actually. And you and some others might have responded to my initial outreach there. But what I realized is that no one from the immediate block answered and then I realized, oh, I guess not everyone on our block is logging in every day to check their Facebook or their next account. You know, I guess I am aware enough from other jobs that I've had and efforts that I've been part of that not everyone is online, but somehow I needed to be reminded of that and that for me to find out things about our neighborhood was going to be going to these neighborhood block club meetings each month, or standing on the street and having a chat with a neighbor because, truthfully, what I've gotten online in terms of historical knowledge pales (0:37:46.0) in comparison to what I've gotten from chats with our neighbors.
37:13	**Laura:** Yeah. It is really just talking with people and so hearing an oral history of their experiences and I think that can limit it to sort of a modern history of what the neighborhood has been like. And there's still more to explore. We still have neighbors here who grew up on the block and, you know, we haven't talked with Troy yet about some of his experiences. We just met somebody two or three blocks down the street whose grandfather owns the house and now the father, and it seems like the family has had quite a bit of troubles. There's references to this guy who is probably in his 30s, his father is gone for a year or two and I think oh, okay, where might he be going to? But that sort of history of there being somebody on the block who has a house that goes back probably to the forties.

	Michael: Yeah. Two or three generations. This is a thing where – same with our organizing efforts, you realize you can't just put out a message online and rally the troupes. There's a much more intimate connection required in a neighborhood like this where there's generational race and class differences, subtle as they may be. Blazing through electronically just isn't the solution. It takes one on one communication. It takes time. We've talked about how people rush in and out to go somewhere and you really have to slow down and take the time, have a chat with the person walking down the street.
38:31	**Laura:** Michael had mentioned, he works from home, and so he'll go to get the mail and if there happens to be one or two neighbors standing there he'll come back to me at the end of the day and I will get home and I will say "So, did you get a lot done?" and he'll say "I actually spent three hours this afternoon talking with this neighbor and then that neighbor." So, it really is – you have to be willing to take it slow in order to really get to know people, which then leads to being able to find out about the history of the neighborhood.
	Michael: I think there is a culture that we're – I suspect you were more in tune with it than I was even. But there is a culture of hanging out and chatting with your neighbors on the street corner that isn't part of my background or experience but it reminds me of experiences I've had overseas, for example, where people aren't rushing around to the mall, or to the job, or to soccer practice and even trying to be a thoughtful person, I find myself in that. I am rushing in and rushing out, don't

	have time to talk. I've got to go here. I am late. I got to go get this thing. Those are the moments when I feel the least connected, and that might be a slight exaggeration that I go and take three hours to pick up the mail, but it isn't that much of an exaggeration because those moments where you're walking the dog or you're picking up your mail and someone is there and you stop and take the time and get to chat with them. Over and over again, like I was talking about Mrs. June earlier, like, I have had five, or six, or seven chats with Mrs. June who has been here for 50 plus years and over the course of a year I think she's just beginning to warm up to me, beginning to share her stories of her past in this neighborhood. If I was just rushing in and out (41:12.8) I would probably never have met her let alone gotten to know her, let alone gotten to know a little bit about what this neighborhood has been like. So, for me there is – and I think we both find this –
40:17	that our lifestyle, perhaps, calls on us to be in a hurry and yet that really doesn't work very well when it comes to getting to know a neighborhood where there is – I think with older people, too, because they're retired and they have time, and partly because there's expectation and a lifestyle that you slow down and talk to your neighbors and you get to know them. You're not always Facebooking. You're not always racing around. For people of our generation, I think that's hard to remember that you have to slow down and talk. **SM:** Where should these stories go? How should they be preserved? Who should find out about them? Where do you think they need to live?

41:12	**Laura:** That's a really good question. I think that's why having opportunity such as this, to be able to record, because so much of it is really about story-telling, about sitting down and talking with people to hear their stories, finding some way to capture it, I think, is one of the only ways you will be able to. It's not that you can – I think transcribing it and writing it down, you inevitably lose the flavor of having that conversation. I think half of the fun is listening to Mrs. June in her cadence, Mrs. Ella in her great way of talking about things that adds, I think, to the richness of the stories. **Michael:** It's not exactly following the format, or your questions, but I want to ask if you will tell the story of when right after we moved in Mrs. Ella and Deborah invited us over when they learned about your mom. **Laura:** Yeah, I think actually this story speaks to what a close-knit community this can be and how welcoming people are. So, when we first moved in my mom was sick. My mom was sick for 13 years with leukemia. So, when we moved in she was having some recurring health issues and I was flying back and forth to take care of her and Michael had told Mrs. Ella and her daughter, Debby about this. We were just getting to know them and I don't know, I guess maybe we were talking to them over the fence, as we did every now and again and Mrs. Ella was recovering from hip surgery so she was walking with a cane and they're Pentecostal, but I am not quite sure. They're good church-going, God fearing and they asked us right away, "Can we pray for you?" And Michael and I were a little taken back because

42:49	we don't go to church and we wanted to be respectful though, so we said "Yeah. Of course, of course," "Well, come on over." So, they had us come over and stood in a circle with us and held our hands. And we both tear up when we think of this story because they prayed for us and they prayed for my mom, and they prayed for me and we'd been here, what, a month? So, every time then, from that time on they were always asking how my mom was doing. When I was gone they would ask Michael "How's Laura holding up" and I was touched by all of it. One of the things, towards the end, my mother passed away in July and towards the end Mrs. Ella told me at that point – you know, she asked me if she could pray with me again and held my hands. I think we were on her front stoop. And she prayed for my mom to find peace and I was so heartened, you know. I think I was always a little nervous that she would always be praying for my mother to recover and it was so reassuring to me that she got it: there's no more getting better, let's just pray for your mom to be comfortable and have peace. **SM:** That's a very powerful kind of familial acceptance into community. **Laura:** Yeah. And others' on the block have similar – they asked for many weeks
43:55	and even months afterwards, they'd ask "How are you doing, Laura?" **Michael:** (Inaudible) (45:47.1) across the street almost breaks down in tears every time. Our neighbor across the street, she is so sweet. She lost her husband just a couple of years ago. I think she really identifies with Laura going through that loss. The two of them, coming or going the two of them will hug. She gets the

	experience. So, we've been really lucky about that. I know even when you were away, I'd be out and about having my three hour chats and everyone in the neighborhood was always asking about you and about your mom. Like, the whole block and extended area, they know Laura, they care about her and they knew that she was struggling through this. So, that meant a lot to both of us.
44:50	**SM:** That's also a testament, I think, to your efforts too of being present and reaching out to people on the street.
	Michael: Well, it's been a mutual acceptance. I don't think we've done anything that everyone else hasn't done for us. It helps that we don't throw crack parties in the house.
	Laura: That does help, yes.
	Michael: I keep trying to but you keep saying we can't.
	SM: s there anything else? I feel like you touched on a lot of issues. Is there
45:47	anything else that you want to share or add?
	Michael: I'll add one thing, which is – and this doesn't make me look very good, but it's funny. We feel like we're good examples of people moving into a neighborhood and trying to be good neighbors, and I think we both, as you mentioned before, we both struggle with what this idea of gentrification means. It is such a relevant, hot topic. It's in the mainstream news because so many cities are going through it. Our neighbors across the bay are going through it. New York is such a symbol of gentrification. There's so much talk about it there. It is

47:02	complicated. So, we show up and we realize that in some ways we represent this concern that is going on and we're trying to not live up to the negative expectations. But I know for myself, you know, I've barely been here a year and some house sells and people move in and I start kind of going, "Well, who are these people." Like, I am already becoming a bit defensive of the neighborhood because what I worry about, and I think we both have shared some ideas about this, is we feel like we stumbled across this golden moment in this golden location, again, just to sound a bit more scientific than I want to be, we live demographically speaking, we live in one of the truly most mixed, diverse communities in our country. You know, the Bay Area is very mixed but often it's very isolated and segregated, frankly. The Golden Gate, Longfellow, Santa Fe area is truly door to door one of the most demographically, racially mixed neighborhoods our country has and I feel like we're really incredibly lucky to have that. There are so few places where you can have so much interaction with people who don't look like you and you can learn from them. And people from different generations and backgrounds coming together, I don't know, I feel like we're just incredibly privileged to have that. But then, as a result, I fear that these changes, just like everyone else wondering about us moving in, their fear is "Will this change? Will we lose that specialness," when, you know, it's strip malls, and condos, (49:25.2) and million dollar houses taking over. Will those changes erode what is making this neighborhood so special?

	Laura: Well, I think – and somebody NextDoor on the neighborhood put a very thoughtful post up addressing that to a certain extent a couple of weeks back and he talked about it as there being, we're at a very particular, very special transition point right now and it is going to change most likely as you get – especially as, you know, condos will go up inevitably. And so, as more people come into the neighborhood and it is going to be more and more difficult to hang onto this
48:40	special point that we have right now where we have a mix of young and old. Even as I am thinking about it I am thinking primarily as a generational mix that makes it so unique and special right now because you've got the people who have been here for generations who can talk about what the neighborhood used to be like and you've got younger people, for lack of a better term, who are interested in hearing about that. That will, perhaps, as the new generations of people moving into the neighborhood start to overtake the old timers that is going to erode. So, unfortunately, I think it will go away and we're incredibly lucky to be here at this
49:52	particular point to be able to experience it. **Michael:** We'll be telling our kid about Mrs. Ella, you didn't get to meet Mrs. Ella, but this is what she was like… that crazy lady down the street, or whatever. You know? It's true. We'll be the carriers of those traditions and stories, I guess. Yeah, I think that we both, you know we'll grouse, like, I wish there were more trees on our street, or oh, that graffiti, but truly we both come back to this thing, wow, we are really lucky to be here now. And we try to appreciate it as much as we can and

	be protective of it. **Laura:** And be involved. **Michael:** And be involved, yeah. We're lucky. **Laura:** So, it had been Santa Fe Elementary School and in my understanding, I think it was about four years ago, the school was closed down. I think it was considered an underperforming school and it was underperforming and at that time the school district stated that it was also underutilized, the number of student at that school. So, they were consolidating schools and the immediate Santa Fe community was extremely upset by it and felt that there were a lot of decisions
50:56	made without their participation and their voices were steamrolled. Perhaps, it is my understanding, they felt that they didn't get all of the information in a timely manner so they couldn't react and so it became a last minute effort on their part to try to prevent the closing. So, I am not quite sure about the impetus for the efforts to attempt to reopen it but there's been a new push of a lot of young families coming into the neighborhood, both in Santa Fe, Longfellow and we've kind of, I don't remember how we first heard about it, but we felt okay, we're on the edge of both those neighborhoods but it would still be a closer school for us than the assigned elementary school which is Sankofa. And Michael and I are trying to adopt and so it's a longer-term issue for us. We're probably six years away from worrying about a school but given that the energy around it is brewing now, we felt like we
51:47	should be paying attention and I felt inspired enough that I wanted to get involved

	to help move the project forward. **SM:** And why do you think a neighborhood school is important? **Laura:** I think that, again, playing into developing a community, so, you're naturally going to have your community around school. The parents all get to know each other; the kids have their playmates and to have that separate from where you live, it takes you out of your community more. Certainly, it happens all over urban areas throughout the country so it's not that we would have this absolutely horrible experience if we suddenly had to go to a school not in our immediate community. But because that is so much a part of what we love about this neighborhood, the sense of community, the sense of knowing our neighbors, to have the opportunity to be at a school where the parents and the children are from our immediate area is very enticing. There is also the reality just that Oakland schools are unfortunately, have so many issues anyway. So, my hope is that if we
53:10	can put new energy into opening a new school, perhaps we can ensure, given that we already know that the parents have an interest in being directly involved, we can ensure that that will actually be a well performing, if not high performing school. **Michael:** And we know from experience that schools where parents can be actively involved both as volunteers in the classroom, playroom monitors, tutoring programs, whatever, having local community involvement in the school is a known ingredient for a successful school. So, if that school is roughly in your

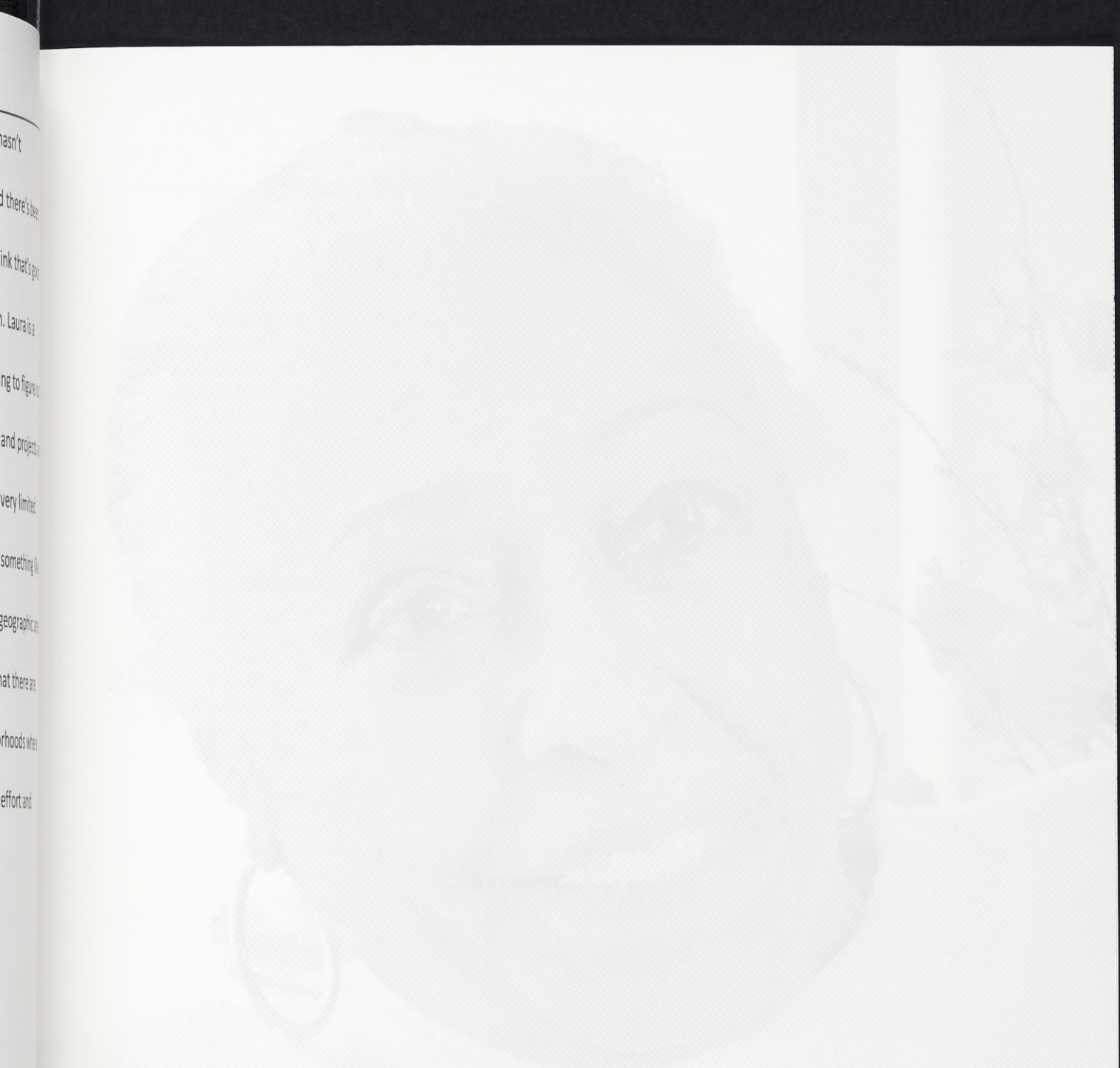
54:14	neighborhood, the parents are going to be far more likely to be involved rather than if you're driving 20 minutes and that's not their neighborhood. So, in some ways it's unfortunate that you even have to ask the question, why is a neighborhood school important, because it's so obviously true. So well backed up by experience. We've been doing the schools for a while now in our civilization and it is really unfortunate that the way it got closed was done in a way that alienated the community and made it more difficult, I think, for this group to have to fight baggage about people's distrust of the school district. Fortunately, there is new leadership in the school district but it's not thorough top to bottom. There is still a lot of old timers there that people don't necessarily feel like are good partners but, you know, you and the team of people that have been working on it have put an extraordinary amount of effort into showing that there is wide community support. You had a big meeting with the superintendent a month ago and that place was packed. It was a real mix of people. A lot of younger people because they have
55:07	school age kids coming. That's not just a narrow sliver of the community. **Laura:** I think it's also pointing to all the change that is going on in the neighborhoods of all the young families moving in. This group is starting to at least try to document some of that so they can go to the school district and say, "No. Listen, it might have been that four years ago there weren't enough students to fill this school, but look at how the neighborhood is changing" and we've even talked about can we use recent home sales to try to update those numbers. Because if

	you look at home sales and there are ways to do projections of how many of those families may have young children, we can also have an anticipation of how many kids will be coming up in the coming years as well. **SM:** So, what does the timeline look like? What's the response (Inaudible)? **Laura:** It's actually, it seems to be shifting. The primary group just had a meeting with chief of schools on Thursday and I haven't heard the update on how that went because the initial plan that they were telling us is that we would be able to submit a proposal this spring and one of the things we were trying to work out is how, exactly how competitive is that and are we competing against Charter schools, the big question is whether or not OUSD is going to be – if they have a hope to get a
56:32	Charter school in their or not. We don't quite know. So, is this a group of concerned parents having to basically compete with a very well organized Charter school who has the resources and knows exactly what it takes to open a school? **Michael:** It's kind of an ironic flip, right? It used to be that the neighborhoods would organize around opening a Charter school, and here's an example of a community rallying around an open enrollment public school. So, a complete 180 degree turn. **Laura:** So, in theory, the last timeline I've heard is the application goes out, or we submit the proposal in the spring and this would potentially be looking at a school opening I believe about a year from that time, or in the fall of that year. So, then like I said, now that's a little bit up in the air because it looks like the actual school

57:24	site right now is being rented out to Emery High School as Emery High School is going through some facility upgrades at their permanent site, so then they move out and so there's now talk of Glenview Elementary School moving in for a two year period for the same reason, and how that would affect our efforts. There's been one idea floated around that, perhaps, if we could still get in there as public school and work jointly with Glenview for at least part of that time which would give the Santa Fe School time to sort of ramp up with enrollment. It's all developing on a weekly basis. **Michael:** I've been really proud of you working on this. Not only has it required you to – not required you. You've had the foresight to realize that this is going to be important for our family in the coming years. But you've really walked in and engaged with them and given them, I think, some really important, strategic thinking, added some strategic thinking to what they're doing, which is important because it's a very complicated and messy environment. I just want that on the record. It's true I really am. I've listened to her participate in some of these meetings and you bring something really important to the conversation and as a newcomer it's something that is really useful for everybody. **Laura:** I think the whole group is very impressive on what everybody is bringing to the table.
58:55	**SM:** It seems like a crucial connection to have. To communicate to be able to have a school.

	Michael: Like I said, it's kind of silly to even have to have a conversation about it. I mean, we do, obviously. That's the reality, but it's unfortunate that that's the reality we have because how would this neighborhood ever evolve, how would we ever educate children in a way that makes them want to stay in this neighborhood and build up Oakland as a vibrant city if we can't give them the education they need to succeed, you know, in 2050 and beyond? **Laura:** It actually, this is sort of going off on a tangent from that but it reminds me just from interacting with that group which is primarily now looking at younger families who have been here maybe five to ten years or less, and these are primarily young families from the Santa Fe, Longfellow area, they have a monthly play-group with the idea of building up community of young families and children,
1:00:00	and getting to know each other. And, again, going back to this idea of how welcoming everybody is because through my participation in these meetings, they've reached out and I've told them, you know, we are trying to adopt, so this is a future issue for us. And one of the women specifically came up to me and said, "You know, you and Michael should really come by the playgroup and just come get to know the families and get to know the parents." And that felt really welcoming. To know that they barely know us, and I felt like they are already in our corner and routing for us. **Michael:** There's been a fair bit of symbiosis I think between Longfellow and Santa Fe, which have a really strong community organizing structure and the Golden

1:01:10	Gate area, which has had a few very strong organizing people but hasn't necessarily been quite as institutional as I think it is over there. And there's been, I think in the last six months or so, a lot of cross fertilization and I think that's good. The groups are talking together. There's no overlap in participation. Laura is a perfect example of that. So, I think the neighborhoods are beginning to figure out how to cooperate and sort of rally behind mutual interests, items, and projects and that is good because individual communities and block clubs have very limited resources and time, and money and attention, and perspective so something like the Santa Fe school is a perfect example where you need a larger geographic area neighborhood and sort of a broad swath of participation. I think that there are other projects that have been relevant in all three or four neighborhoods where there might be more opportunity to try to bundle resources in an effort and attention. **(Audio Ends)**



"WELL, IT'S JUST GOOD TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS, PERIOD."

–Josephine Lee

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PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Josephine Lee, 2015

Photo by Matt Dibble

	marksearch_Josephine Lee 1/20/15 Video Transcript
	Josephine: My name is Josephine Lee.
	Sue Mark: So you're going to look at me.
	Josephine: My name is Josephine Lee. I was born and raised in Oakland, California, August the 29th, 1925. I was six years old when my parents bought a home in Berkeley. I grew up in Berkeley and went to school at the grammar school, junior high and high school, and then to college in Berkeley.
00:40	**SM:** Why did your family move from Oakland to Berkeley?
	Josephine: To buy property. They wanted to buy a home in Berkeley. The Berkeley area was more conducive to good schools. At that time Berkeley had one of the best school systems in the state of California.
	SM: And can you talk a little bit about how your parents came to California?
	Josephine: My mother and father came to California in 1918 after my father came back from World War I. He came to California because he started working for Southern Pacific Railroad and they ran from Oakland, California to New Orleans, Louisiana and he was a chef cook for the Southern Pacific Railroad.
	SM: And where in Oakland did
	Josephine: I don't know.
	SM: They didn't tell you?
	Josephine: They lived in North Oakland, someplace in North Oakland but as far as their address, that was 85 years ago. I don't remember.

	SM: I was just curious what area of the city.
	Josephine: North Oakland. Because I know we lived down there near Lionel Wilson and it was on 34th. So it was someplace in North Oakland 'cause that was considered North
1:57	Oakland and it wasn't considered West Oakland. At one time the borders, not the border but the end line, North Oakland started at DeFremery Park (2:13.6) which was on 16th. Then it moved out to what was West Grand now, which used to be 22nd Street. Now it is, West Oakland is all the way out to MacArthur. So it kept moving out and out, and out.
	SM: That's interesting. And let's talk a little bit about how you came here to the Golden Gate neighborhood.
	Josephine: Well, my husband died. We had just built a home up in El Cerrito hills, in East Richmond Heights on the Arlington. Then he passed away and I sold that place and bought this place down here.
	SM: How did you chose this neighborhood?
	Josephine: My realtor chose it for me. This was a good investment because it was income
03:12	property.
	SM: So, we're talking about how you came to the Golden Gate neighborhood. Could you say what year it was when you came?
	Josephine: Yes. I bought this property in 1967.
	SM: How did your realtor present the area to you?
	Josephine: Well, we looked at different places – you know how a realtor works, don't you? Well, we looked at different places and I decided I wanted this duplex in this area. This was a nice neighborhood and that's why I decided to buy it, plus the price was right.
	SM: Can you describe what the area was like, what the neighborhood was like?

	Josephine: It was I want to say it was '75, at that time it was about 50/50 I think.
	SM: 50/50?
04:13	**Josephine:** Black and white. It is almost like now it is starting to get back to that. At one time it went up to 75% black and then now it is back to 50/50 again I'd say because the new people buying the house, the duplex that just went in up the street – that just sold up the street sold for $600,000. It went on the market for $550,000 and it sold for $600,000 and that was sold to Caucasians. Now there is another one that there was a for sale sign on it the other day and now the for sale sign is gone, the one right next to Quarter Pounder. I saw the for sale sign up on it and now the for sale sign is gone so I guess it sold that quick. These people are moving back in from Orinda and Lafayette. This friend of mine who is a realtor, she told me she is selling a lot of property to people from Orinda and Lafayette because they are moving back into town. They are tired of that long commute and they can
05:23	jump right on Bart and go to San Francisco or go wherever they want to go to work. So that's what's bringing them. They can't buy in San Francisco because the cost is just prohibitive over there and over here it is getting just about as high because these places are renting now for $2000 a month.
	SM: What are some other memorable things about the neighborhood? Like, what do you remember from the early years? What helped you feel like you were at home in this neighborhood?
	Josephine: The majority of the people in this block, we own our own unit. We own our own duplexes. We live in one unit and rent one unit out. So, we are right here on the property and we keep our property up. This is why the neighborhood looks so nice. The one thing, the five duplexes across the street, one, two, three, four, five, they're owned by Mr.

	Martin. Mr. Martin's family, his wife tried to buy up all these duplexes at one time and she couldn't, but anyhow, those five are all rented out, those five duplexes and the realtor who
07:03	is doing the managing of that property, he is not keeping it up. You can tell that. You can look across the street and see the way that house looks over there; it needs painting so badly. But the rest of us, we live on our property and we keep our property up. So, that's why it's a nice, quiet neighborhood. Now, the other side of 54th, east of San Pablo is an entirely different scene.
	SM: What's that scene like?
	Josephine: They have a lot of robberies over there. They have a lot of shooting over there and different things like that. I have a friend who lives at 900 block of 54th Street which is
07:49	between Gaskill (Phonetics 7:49.1) and Lowell, and he has constant trouble over there with his neighbors. Not with his neighbors but with the drive-bys and all that. You see Gaskill Street, Gaskill is the next street over San Pablo and Gaskill going east. And Gaskill used to be known as the drug capital. You could buy any kind of drugs you wanted on Gaskill Street, from 53rd to 60th. Now we've just about got it – we've got it a little under control; it's not quite as bad but it used to be so bad because the minute one drug lord would get arrested and put in jail, there'd be someone else to take his place.
	SM: So, what's helped with some of the changes?
	Josephine: Well, we got our crime committee together and then NCPC came into effect, Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council. And we have 54 of those, you know, in the city of Oakland. So ours is beat 10X for this area. We work with our problem solving officer who is assigned to this area and that's how we got crime down. Crime is really – we've got it just
09:06	about under control now. This is very quiet. Very seldom do you hear of a shooting, I think,

	in December. This young woman up on 55th, between Gaskill and Lowell had someone drive-by shooting and they weren't shooting at their house, they were shooting at someone else and the bullet hit her house and she was very upset about that but that's about the only thing that has happened lately.
	SM: And how did you start to get involved with the neighborhood –
	Josephine: Because when I retired I decided I wasn't going to be a prisoner in my house. I was going to take my streets back and I became a neighborhood activist.
	SM: What year was that?
	Josephine: 1985 when I retired.
	SM: And what kind of work were you doing?
	Josephine: I was the director of the dispersing office of Naval Air Station. Director of the military pay department.
	SM: How long had you been there?
10:13	**Josephine:** I had been there, let's see, I was at Treasure Island for 27 years and then I took over the department at Naval Air Station and I retired from Naval Air Station. I worked for the federal government for 39 years. I started as a file clerk and I wound up as a director of the military pay department. They sent me to a lot of schools, training and everything and I went up the ladder.
	SM: That's a great opportunity.
	Josephine: Yes, it was.
	SM: So, tell me this decision to be a neighborhood activist, what did you do first?
	Josephine: What motivated me?
	SM: Yeah. What motivated you and what did you do first? How did you embark on that?

Josephine: Well, we started out before NCPC came into effect we had a crime committee. We had our own crime committee that we had formed because, as I said, I just didn't want to be a prisoner and we weren't going to let the drug dealers who were all up and down San Pablo at that time, and we just decided we'd ban together, the neighbors would ban together with the police and stop it and that's what prompted me to do it.

SM: That seems really brave to do.

Josephine: Well, you could either be a victim or you could be an activist. Somebody has to step forward and do it. You can't just sit there and wait for the police to do everything. You

11:44 have to work with them.

SM: What about block clubs? I've heard other people talk about block clubs.

Josephine: Yeah. Some of them had block clubs. They had a 56th Street block club.

SM: What was that like?

Josephine: That was – I don't know what they really did too much but they were active in keeping things – trying to quell things in the neighborhood and all. And then they would discuss what was going on from one block to the next and all like that. And out of the 56th Street block club stemmed the opening to the Friends of the Golden Gate Library because in 19 – I am trying to think, 1990 – let me see, that was 1991 when they were talking about closing our library, the Golden Gate Library and that's when we really came together.

12:45 **SM:** And who was part of this block club?

Josephine: The original ones, I forget the lady's name that died, but Laudie Rose, Louis Griffin, Donna Pierce, Ken Wilkins, Ken Morgen, myself.

SM: How diverse was the group did you feel in terms of black and white?

Josephine: Donna, Laudie ... Donna and Laudie were white, Caucasian. The rest were black.

	SM: So, before that there was no Friends of the Golden Gate? **Josephine:** No. We didn't have a friend's group. But we got together and we worked on – let's see, which one came first (Inaudible 14:00.1) came first on the ballot and then measure Q and we were very active on both of them. **SM:** What was going on with the library? **Josephine:** They were cutting back the funds, money. It's always the bottom line, money. So, that's why and they thought that they would – and they'd come to the black
14:00	neighborhoods first and not go up to Monclair; they come to the black neighborhoods first and they're going to cut just like the schools where they cut the most, Golden Gate, Santa Fe. So, that's how it happens, they cut in the black neighborhoods first. **SM:** So, what did this group start to do? **Josephine:** We worked on the proposition. We worked on measure I. We worked on – and it passed. **SM:** And what did you do internally in the library? I am thinking about the computer lab that you had told me about. **Josephine:** The computer lab came out of HUD funds. Now, we started getting money from HUD community – let me see the name of that group now. Community Development, Community Neighborhood Development Group. They had one in each area. There was seven areas in Oakland and lower income areas and ours was one of the groups in the lower income area. We got money from HUD and the money was sent through to the City
15:05	of Oakland for the use of the computer lab at the library to fund the computer lab in the library but it had to be issued. It was directed to Oakland and then they had to issue it to us on vouchers.

	SM: Was this before the time that they were thinking of closing the library?
	Josephine: This was after. This was in the 90s. After they were talking about (Inaudible 16:07.4). This was after. It was passed and the library remained opened. So, the library was still in effect then because they did not close it. Then we got the money for the computer lab but we had to go through Oakland and the voucher system. And we started off with ten computers and then we were able to, HUD gave us some money to hire a person to staff the computer lab but the money was issued monthly through HUD.
	SM: What do you remember about the (16:55.8) Lasartemay collection that was at the
16:07	library?
	Josephine: All I really remember about them was that they had half of the library and – they restored it and the retrofitting and all of that in restoration, they restored it and it became the Black History Library and they moved from Golden Gate to this library.
	SM: Why did you have misgivings about them being at the Golden Gate Library?
16:55	**Josephine:** Because they were taking up our space. That was a part of the children's library. We had the children's library on one side and the junior and seniors on the other side.
	SM: What do you remember about any events that they had or Interactions with the community?
	Josephine: No. I don't. I really don't.
18:10	**SM:** What did you start to do with the library, specifically thinking about the Summer Jazz?
	Josephine: That was in 1990 that we started. Donald Duck Baily and Susie Lorrain started it because they used to rehearse over there on Tuesday nights. They'd have jam sessions and they'd rehearse and then on Sunday they would perform so then in 1992 Donald and Susie

	left and I took over. And I started (Inaudible 19:32.1) there was no longer the jam sessions on Tuesday night but we had the jazz on Sunday and we did it for eight week each year. We do it from the second Sunday in July through the end of August. Those eight Sundays. We have a different artist every week. The feature artists is from 3:00 – 4:00. From 4:00 – 4:30 we have the history of jazz and then we have the raffle and then we have the house band that plays and had an open jam session from 5:00 to 6:00. This allows the youngsters in the neighborhood, or whoever has an instrument, the youngsters and the adult to come and sit
19:12	in and they can jam.
	SM: Who comes to these events?
	Josephine: Mostly ... standing room only.
	SM: And why is it something that is important to you?
	Josephine: Because I love music. I been on 19 Jazz cruises. I just love music.
	SM: And why do you feel it's important for the community?
	Josephine: Because – the majority of the people in the neighborhood are low income
20:15	people. They're renters. They can't afford to go to these nightclubs and pay $40 and $50 dollars to go see these artists. They going to see them for free. And they look forward to it every year. This will be our 25th year.
	SM: That's great. Seems like an important service.
	Josephine: It is. It is, and they love it. And music is a melting pot and it is not just blacks, it's all nationalities there. You have Asians, Whites, you have everybody is there on Sunday because music is one place where there is no colored line. It's your talent that counts. I am one of the few in my family that doesn't play an instrument. My cousin is Dianne Reeves, and she just sang New Year's Eve with the New York Symphony orchestra at Lincoln Hall. At

	Lincoln Center in New York. She has three Grammy's. So she's very well known. And her
21:13	uncle, my other cousin, he was the first black, he just retired from the Denver Symphony orchestra, he is a bassist.
	SM: That's wonderful. That's a big achievement.
	Josephine: Yes it is.
	SM: Especially in Colorado.
	Josephine: He came out here and played with the San Francisco symphony orchestra also, symphony orchestra but then he said
	it was too many nuts and fruits out here and he had to go back to Denver.
22:15	**SM:** What about SPAGGIA (San Pablo Avenue Golden Gate Improvement Association)? Have you been with that neighborhood group?
	Josephine: I was with SPAGGIA for a long time until just recently. San Pablo Avenue Golden Gate Improvement association.
	SM: What was the aim of that group?
	Josephine: We did the improvement in – we got façade improvement to a lot of the places. We got the money from Oakland. The majority of the places in Oakland you 25 % and 75 % but here they gave 50/50 because this was a low income area and a lot of the façade improvement, in other words the businesses would put up 50 % and the city would put up 50 % for façade improvement with the understanding that the ones we're renting, that if they did façade improvement that the owners could not go up on their rent after they did the façade improvement. They did that and we tried to get rid of a lot of these
23:20	tacky auto repair places on San Pablo Avenue.
	SM: What kinds of places were on San Pablo when you first moved here in the '60s?

	Josephine: We had drug stores. We had on the corner of San Pablo and Stanford there was Stroms, clothing store.
	SM: What was that like?
	Josephine: It was a big clothing store. It was a nice business and they had a fire there and they never reopened. Where the Star Bethel Baptist Church is now, that used to be Golden
24:20	Gate Theatre. So, it's been a lot of different improvements. A lot of changes. I don't say improvements, changes because I don't think that – we call that the holy corner now.
	SM: Why do you call that the holy corner?
	Josephine: Because the Ashram (Phonetics 25:30.4) owns three corners. Where Stroms was, they bought that building. The building where the Ashram is, their chapel or whatever you want to call that meditation place is, and then the third corner where they have that vacant lot. That's three corners at an intersection, and they pay no taxes because they're a
25:21	religious group. They pay no taxes to the city of Oakland and this, to me, we tried to get them to bill something on the corner where the lot is, the parking lot is. We said "Why don't you put up condos there or something and make some money?" and they said "We're not interested in making money." So, you know, then from Stanford down to 55th they have all of that. That's a whole block of tax free money that the City of Oakland is not getting. But none of your counsel people or anybody wants to touch it because it's a religious group and they're afraid and this bugs me because it's just sitting there. That's
25:53	property just, lots right on 55th and San Pablo there is another vacant lot that they have that they don't use.
	SM: What are some other businesses that you remember in the area that made the

	community –
	Josephine: Hagstroms. There used to be a Hagstroms food store.
	SM: What kind of food store was that, like grocery?
	Josephine: Grocery store, yeah. There was a bar in there. There was, I am trying to think, a beauty shop and another furniture store on the corner of 55th and San Pablo there was a furniture store. A small furniture store but then the Ashram took over just little by little they bought up that whole block.
	SM: What year was that that you started seeing those changes?
27:15	**Josephine:** In the '90s.
	SM: Were there more diverse businesses –
	Josephine: Before that? Yes. Yes there were a lot of businesses and little, small businesses in there and all. Beauty shops, barber shops, things like that.
	SM: Restaurants, do you remember?
	Josephine: No. There were no restaurants. No.
	SM: What are some other changes that you've noticed recently in the neighborhood?
	Josephine: Well, just recently Gateway Market on 59th and San Pablo, it was just recently sold. So, I don't know who bought it. I know they've changed the products already in there because they used to sell a lot of greens and things that black people bought, now they are changing their products. So, I don't know who they're catering to now.
28:40	**SM:** And what other changes?
	Josephine: There's going to be a bar that is going to open between 55th and 56th. These two young men from San Francisco are remodeling it now. It used to be a bar a long time ago and then it was closed for years so now they've bought the business and they're

	remodeling it and getting ready to open and file for their license, permit, and all that. They have gone out with a notification to the neighborhood and all. So, we're looking forward to them opening. I am trying to think of what else.
	SM: Can we talk a little bit about gentrification, because last time we spoke we were talking about gentrification and whether that's what was happening to the neighborhood
29:40	and can you define –
	Josephine: I don't call it gentrification, really. I – some people might say it's gentrification but I don't call it gentrification. The people just buy. People buy who have the money to buy. Now, if your parents sacrificed and all to buy half their property and have it paid for and all, and then when they pass away and it's left to you and you and your brothers and sisters decided to sell it to the first realtor who comes along and waves some money under your nose and then you're going to move to Antioch or Pittsburg, then that's not gentrification to me.
	SM: What's gentrification to you?
	Josephine: I really don't consider it gentrification when a neighborhood is taken over by
30:40	one group or another.
	SM: But can you think of an example? We had talked a little bit about it.
	Josephine: Yes. We had and then the more I got to thinkin about it, I said "It's not really gentrification. It's just whoever has the money or the credit to buy. They buy." Nobody can force you to sell you property so they don't realize that it might look like a lot of money but where are you going to buy at present day costs. Unless you go way out in the sticks. Even Antioch and Brentwood, and Pittsburg is not cheap any more. The majority of them that sell, their parent's had these places and they don't have good credit and they don't have

	the cash money so that money they get for selling their place, it's gone in a minute. Then what do they have to show for it?
	SM: And how do you get to know your new neighbors that come in?
	Josephine: I go and introduce myself to them and tell them "I am your neighborhood block captain, and if you have any problems, come check with me or call me" and I give them one
31:48	of those pamphlets that I gave you and these are the numbers to call for different things that go wrong or that you might need in your neighborhood. 'Cause you have to know your neighbors, in the event that an earthquake or something, who is on life supports? Who is using oxygen and has to have a generator or something, so you have to know who is in your neighborhood. That's what a good block captain does. That's what you're supposed to do, know your neighbors.
	SM: Why else is it important to know your neighbors do you think?
	Josephine: Well, it's just good to know your neighbors, period. They used to call it being nosey, but now it's just on the outlook because if strange cars or something are in the neighborhood and you're not familiar with – you know, you know whose got certain cars, who's cars are whose and if you see strange cars in the neighborhood, or a van or something you want to know if this person moving or is this somebody breaking in their
33:10	house stealing. So, those of us who are retired, that's what we do.
	SM: Do new neighbors contact you if you found that?
	Josephine: Yes. And we have national night out every year. We have a big party.
	SM: Where is that party?
	Josephine: Right here.
	SM: On the block?

34:12	**Josephine:** No. In my driveway. **SM:** Oh. In your driveway. So what happens in your driveway? **Josephine:** We have food and the people come and gather and mix and mingle, and talk, and introduce themselves and all, the new ones. It's a block party and it's for people to mix and mingle. **SM:** How long have you been doing that? How long have you been hosting that? **Josephine:** About 10 years. **SM:** When we talked before, you talked about some new people moving in and fences, do you feel like – **Josephine:** One incident, one incident and that's all. If you look down this block you'll see one fence and I got him straightened out about that. He has since sold his property and moved to Sacramento. **SM:** Can you tell the story about what happen with that? **Josephine:** Yes. He started to put up the fence. He was going to put it up right on the sidewalk, adjacent to the sidewalk. I waited 'til he got the poles in and everything set in the concrete and then I had code compliance come out and tell him that it had to be 13 feet back from the street and that he had to dig them up and move them back. Then I went and told him, "My Name is Mrs. Lee and I am the one that reported you. If you bought in this neighborhood, you going to put up a mote around your house? That's an insult to the neighbors. "Well, I didn't mean it that way. I just wanted the privacy." I said, "No, that wasn't it." "Well, I asked the neighbors." I said, "No, you didn't. You asked them if you could put up a chain link fence. You didn't ask if you could put up a wood fence around your house like a moat." That's was the only incident. We haven't had any other people

who put up fences, as you can plainly see. There are no fences but his on this street. Now, he's gone. The fence is still there but at least it's 13 feet back from the street.

SM: How long was he there?

Josephine: About a year. I told him, I say "You can either be a neighbor and cooperate or you can be an enemy." "Well, I didn't mean it that way." I said "Yes, you did. You wouldn't have put this fence up if you hadn't."

35:55 **SM:** Did he ever participate in any of the meetings?

Josephine: No. No.

SM: And what's happened since in your involvement with SPAGGIA? What have you noticed about the neighborhood group?

Josephine: I am not longer active in SPAGGIA so I don't know what they're doing now but I know when we were active in SPAGGIA, Charles, who is now deceased, and Jim Golden who has moved out to Rossmoor, and Larry and myself, the four of us are no longer active in SPAGGIA. But we were the ones that got the medium strip in. See from 53rd to 67th is Oakland. Now, San Pablo you know is State Highway, so to get the median strip in Tyron, at the time, for extending their environmental zone they gave us $800,000, no $600,000 and the City of Oakland was – Caltrans was going to give us the $800,000 to put up the median strip. So then Caltrans told us we had to wait. So, the City of Oakland was going to put up the 800,000 to make the $14,000 for 1,400,000 for the medium strip. Then after we get all the plans and everything in, then Caltrans decides they're going to come in and give us the money. So, then we have to go back to square one because we have to comply with what

37:17 Caltrans wants to do and start all over on the median strip and all. So, then we did. We finally did and we got – we walked the area and when we got to 54th Street I said "We have

	a problem here." You know, for the cutoffs and where you're going to come through, I said "Don't have it to come through on 54th because from that mini mall over there to the hamburger place, to the chaparral, that's three a three corner area," they would run and sell their drugs over there and then they come over there and sell drugs and so we didn't have a cutoff there so that that would curtail it a little. They couldn't drive through. So, we had our cutoff at 53rd, 55th like that. And we walked the neighbors walked the area to decide where they wanted the through streets and all and it was agreed upon. So, then we got the median strip in. We got the banners. Arnold White who did the banners, we had a
38:30	contest and the artists submitted their drawings to have who was going to be selected for the banners to do the banners. And Arnold White won. He was the only artist. A lot of them were graphics artists and just submitted graphics plans and then we got the banners and then the last thing that we did before the redevelopment when busted before Jerry Brown took over, took our redevelopment money away from the cities, was we got street lights. We told redevelopment that we needed street lights because the lights on San Pablo were for the cars, they weren't for the sidewalk pedestrians. So they said "Oh, we don't have the money. We don't have the money." So, when Paul Parkman and what's the other one, Paul Parkman put up his building on 65th and then I forget what the name of the project was that put up there's. On 65th was the condos that went up and then Paul Parkman put up his
39:40	on 66th, that was tax money. So, we told redevelopment, okay, you got the money now. So, they gave us a million dollars to put up the lights, the sidewalk lights. **SM:** When did that happen? Was that like 2000? **Josephine:** It was 2000, yeah. 2000, let's see, this is 2015 so it must have been around 2010 because it was just before redevelopment went busted. We can check back and see

40:18	when redevelopment busted, when Jerry Brown took over, took redevelopment away because that was the last thing that we did. So, that was the three things that I wanted done for San Pablo. And our code compliance person that we have now is not as good as the person we had before years ago. We had Penny Feeham, she was our code compliance person and she cleaned up San Pablo. She got all those junky auto repair places, those eyesores and all, she got them out of the way but then they kept picking on Penny so finally Penny just decided she would quit and go to San Diego. **SM:** So what do you want to see for San Pablo Avenue? How do you want it to grow? **Josephine:** I would like one thing, I want the graffiti gone. Graffiti doesn't do anything but
41:28	tear a neighborhood down. It trashes the neighborhood. I would like to see all of those auto repair places – there's one right over here on 53rd and San Pablo, R & H, they're only supposed to have seven cars at a time on that lot because they have one well. And they are supposed to have seven cars. They've got about 20 cars in that lot right now because they use the cars to take spare parts of them to keep the fleet of taxi cabs going that they work on. And nobody says anything. We had one code compliance person and he said "Well, I can't go in there. That's private property." "What if they're doing something against the law, can't you go in there with the police?" "Oh, well, I can't do this, and I can't do that." I said, "Oh." What I'd like to see is to see something go up on those lots where the Ashram had vacant lots. I would like to see more businesses on San Pablo. **SM:** Like what kind of businesses?
42:50	**Josephine:** Restaurants, shoe repair places, anything business-wise. **SM:** Like practical things? **Josephine:** Yes. Yes. A beauty shop, a clothing store, drug stores. We've got CVS down

	here, so of course I don't think we'll get no individual drug store because these chain drug stores – these chain businesses run out individual businesses. Now, I understand Radio Shack is going broke. So, you know the – I guess there's no way for them to compete price-wise.
	SM: What do you think would bring long-time residents and new residents together?
	Josephine: Your neighborhood watch, things like that. Just like SPAGGIA, now they don't have any meetings. When we were in SPAGGIA we used to have meetings once a month on Saturday morning. SPAGGIA doesn't have any meetings. They just have a board and then they email things out to people. Well, everybody doesn't have email. And a lot of your
44:17	older people don't have email and there are a lot of older people in this neighborhood. So, you don't – you have no togetherness.
	SM: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about that we didn't cover?
	Josephine: I would like to see Oakland support the library, the City of Oakland, not the library branch but the City of Oakland support the library more.
	SM: Why is that?
	Josephine: Because they need it. Your library is just like your rec center. It is the hub of the neighborhood. Like our computer lab is a lot of these youngsters whose families can't afford computers in their homes so in order to make the field level for them to compete in
45:18	school, with their research and all, they have to use the computers at the library. People come to do their resumes at the library for jobs. It's just the center of things because they don't have it at home, they come to the library for it. They come to the library for their entertainment. We have literacy classes at the library. It is the center of learning and things just like now, tax time is coming to and we're going to have someone over there to help

	people do their taxes. It is the center of things; you need your libraries in your areas. Also, I know another thing I didn't tell you. We finally, after 30 years of working we finally are getting a new rec center: Golden Gate Rec Center, on 62nd and Herzog (48:20.2). They've
46:38	torn the old rec center down and they're going to have a new rec center. It is going to have an indoor basketball court; it's going to have a cooking center, or cooking areas for people to learn how to cook and all that. It is going to be completely new. It has taken us 30 years to get –
	SM: Why did it take so long?
	Josephine: Because they didn't have any money, again, it's m-o-n-e-y, money. So, finally we got it.
47:22	**SM:** How did the old rec center serve the community?
	Josephine: Well, the school is right there and after school the children come over and there's like – the children stay there and learn and do their homework until their parents come from work and pick them up. They also have activities. They take them bowling. They take them swimming. They have all sorts of activities for the children in the area. So, it's well needed. You want these kids off the street. They have to have someplace to go. Now, they have outdoor basketball courts in the summer when the weather is good but when it's
48:20	raining, we want an indoor basketball court for them and a rec a place to go. It's going to have a stage and everything. It's going to be – the plans are beautiful for it. So, I am very glad for that and one of the people who was so instrumental in helping us with fighting to get this rec center built all of this time has passed away, Charles. The last thing Charles said "I hope I live to see it." So, he passed away, so we're trying to get the rec center named in his honor. So, that's what I am working on now with Dan Kalb and some of the others, to

	get that rec center named for Charles Porter because Charles played there. He went to Golden Gate there. He played there as a youngster. He worked towards getting it organized and all and the different activities there and we just feel like it should be named for him if there's any way possible.
	SM: So, he grew up and then ended up living in the neighborhood?
	Josephine: Yes. His mother still lives over there on 53rd. And he lived on 53rd two doors off
49:27	of San Pablo. And he couldn't go to Emery High. He had to go clear across town to Tech because Emery High was so damn prejudiced then that they didn't let black people in Emery High.
	SM: What year was that?
	Josephine: That was back in the '50s. So, it wasn't only in the south. We had an awful lot of prejudice right here.
	SM: Do you feel like sharing any of the other stories?
	Josephine: No. I don't. I really don't. I am very upset about Selma now, that movie. So, I don't feel, I really don't feel like sharing that with you.
	SM: I haven't seen that yet.
	Josephine: Oh, you need to see it.
	SM: It's at the top of my list. There was one story that you had told me – I don't know if
50:40	you feel like sharing it about a realtor who called you?
	Josephine: Oh, yeah, that woman that called and told me she wanted me to – was I interested in selling my home and I said no I am not. And she said, "You don't want to sell?" And I said, "No. Where would I go?" And she said "Well, you can go to a retirement home." And I told her "Who in the hell do you think you are to tell me where I should go. I have no

	intention of selling my home and if I ever do it won't be to you." And I slammed the phone down in her face. So, I still get letters – different realtors send me letters and ask if I am interested in selling. Well, they're interested in it is a commission. So, I just throw them in the trash can because I have no intentions of selling this place. It's been paid for for over 35 years. I paid for this place before I retired and I have been retired since 1985.
	SM: That's a rare thing in this day and age.
	Josephine: What? To pay for your place?
	SM: Yes.
	Josephine: A lot of the older people who paid for their homes because we got them before the market went up. So, we paid them off before we retired.
	SM: Is there anything else that you want to share with me?
52:05	**Josephine:** I can't think of anything else. I tell you one thing, all of this demonstration and all of these demonstrations and things that are going on now, that happened in Ferguson. That happened in New York, but don't forget it also happened in Fruitvale out there where that boy was killed and peaceful demonstrations, I am in favor of but these professional people who come in that aren't from the area, and destroy Oakland, I am not in favor of. And I do not appreciate them breaking the windows. They broke every window in Bank of America on San Pablo right down here in Emeryville. This is destructive. That is not demonstrating and don't use the name of you're in favor, you're doing this to demonstrate for this black fella that was killed. You're not doing that. You're coming here to destroy. This is not helping us at all and throwing bottles at the police, what would we be like if we didn't have police? We need the police. They're not all rotten. We have a lot of good police. I was at a meeting last Monday, a week ago yesterday and the leadership meetings who

	does the chair and vice chair of NCPC, so we had this meeting every other month,
53:03	leadership meeting to see what's going on in the different areas, different beats, and I looked up and I saw this fella, I said "Oliver?" And he said "Oh, Mrs. Lee." And he came and hugged me. When he first started out on the police, he was a young patrolman in our neighborhood here. This was before NCPC. He is now deputy police chief and I was so proud of him because I've seen him come a long and we have good policemen. We have a
53:45	lot – I have another good friend, young man that I have seen and worked with, Steve Mitchell, Everett Peterson, these are good policeman. They're not all rotten. There may be a few rotten ones, but hey, don't take it out against the whole police force because we need police and all this destruction and I will tell you one thing, 80% of those people are white because a black person, like they stopped Caltrans, I mean Amtrak, no black people going to lay down in front of no train 'cause they know that they don't have bumpers. No black person is going to get out there on I-80 and stop traffic 'cause general motors didn't make them no bumpers. So, that's not us. A lot of those people are Caucasians and they are coming in here, I don't know who is sponsoring them because these people couldn't
54:50	have a job and be doing all that picketing and stuff. They go from one place to another. They are professional picketers. Somebody has to be paying them. I don't know who it is. I don't know who is doing it but someone is behind it. Now, I don't know if it's a John Birch Society, if it's the Ku Klux Klan or if it's a tea party. I do not know. But somebody is paying these people. And they need to get to the base of it.
	SM: So you feel like it is just a really dangerous counter-force?
	Josephine: I do. I really do. And do you know what its cost so far? And this was not
55:41	counting since January, but just through the end of December it has cost the City of

Oakland over $1,400,000 just in overtime for the police. This is coming out of our tax pay in money. So, hey, don't come to Oakland to demonstrate all the time. Go some place else. I hope Libby Schaff does something about it because they're coming here to demonstrate and all that because they know they can get away with it. Then they turn around and want to sue. You want to sue because you got arrested for vandalizing something, property and stuff? No, no, no. I am not in favor of that. Peaceful demonstration I can see but not destructive, no. So, hopefully Oakland will change now that we have a new mayor because it's a lot of work that needs to be done. There's a lot that has been done but there's a lot

56:41 still to be done.

SM: I agree.

Josephine: Okay.

SM: I think we covered everything.

Josephine: I hope so. And starting this year I will remind people again that this will be our 25th year and another thing, the reason I was saying about the Oakland being more friendly towards, and more helpful towards the libraries, the Jazz on Sunday has been funded primarily by Emeryville, not Oakland. Emeryville shares our library, you know, but Emeryville has been the one that has helped us. The library gives us the printing for the brochures that we send out for the announcements for the programs but as far as money, I

57:51 got money one time from the City of Oakland and that was from Jane Brunner, not from the City of Oakland. That was when Jane Brunner was our city council person and it was the year that she ran for reelection. All the other times the money came from Emeryville to help us with our library. We didn't get any money from Oakland.

SM: So, what's the fate now? How does the support coming from Emeryville?

58:56	**Josephine:** Well, I don't know because we have enough money for this year. I am going to do this year and then I don't know. I am going to see how – then we sell raffle tickets and all like that, but that's just a little bit. We have a membership drive. We have Friends of the Golden Gate Library members. We raise money that way but as far as – because the program costs me to do it the eight weeks; it cost me $6,400 and that's because most of the musicians sort of just do scale. They don't charge me full price for that time, otherwise we wouldn't be able to do it but we need money and we need grants. **SM:** So, who is going to carry the torch after you. **Josephine:** I don't know.
59:47	**SM:** Who are you training? **Josephine:** I don't know. I am not training anybody. The one person that I thought that I would train, he has gotten sick so he is unable to carry. I start in February lining up my artists and everything and getting them ready because you have to get into their schedule early because they have different things. So, I start in February. I will start getting my artists together and everything and getting everything lined up and all. Then I just block out those eight weeks and that's the eight weeks that I give to the library to do Jazz on Sunday and then the final day we always wind up with a big party. But that's it. I really wish that Oakland would give more money towards the library, towards the Jazz program and different things because it's needed and it helps a lot of people. We have standing room only for every concert. And I will be 90 this year so I don't know how much longer I am going to be able to do it.
1:00:45	**SM:** Well, it's a massive contribution. **Josephine:** I enjoy it. I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it because I don't get that much help.

	It's a labor of love.
	SM: I believe it. Most things in life are that way.
	Josephine: Really, yes.
	SM: Well, thank you.
	Josephine: You're more than welcome. I hope I have been able to be of some assistance.
	SM: Yeah. I think this will be really helpful and what we're planning to do is use some of the video, I mentioned to you that I am going to have this –
1:01:45	**Josephine:** Yeah, you're going to audit it.
	SM: -- in May and June, so we'll use some video there. And we'll have a website, and then I am also going to be talking to the different archives to see if we might want to use some of the footage of the stories because there aren't very many places to get neighborhood stories.
	Josephine: And I was talking to this friend of mine, Donna Pierce who is one of the people who was on the original Friends of the Golden Gate Library, she's not well now and she's not active anymore, but she has a lot of material over there and she was asking me, she said "Josephine, what shall I do with all of this stuff?" And I said "Donna, I am going to try to find some space for you." One of those file cabinets over there, because we have a couple of file cabinets over there full of stuff and I said "I am going to try to find some
1:03:08	space so that we can put –"
	SM: What kinds of things does she have? What does she have?
	Josephine: She has material from the Friends of the Golden Gate Library. So, I told her I would take it and go through – she and I would go through it and see what we should throw away and what we should keep for the record, you know. We, eventually, it got too

	much for us and we just like Temescal (1:05:02.1) Library when they first started with the tool-lending library and then they had the main library to take over the operation of it because at first they started out with just doing it themselves. So, we started out with just doing the computer lab our self with the help of HUD and all. Then it got so big we had the library to take it over because the whole city was using it. So, we had the library to take it over.
1:03:58	**(Audio Ends)**

"'I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.' AND WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER."

–Aidan McAleenan

"'I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.' AND WE'RE
ALL IN THIS TOGETHER."

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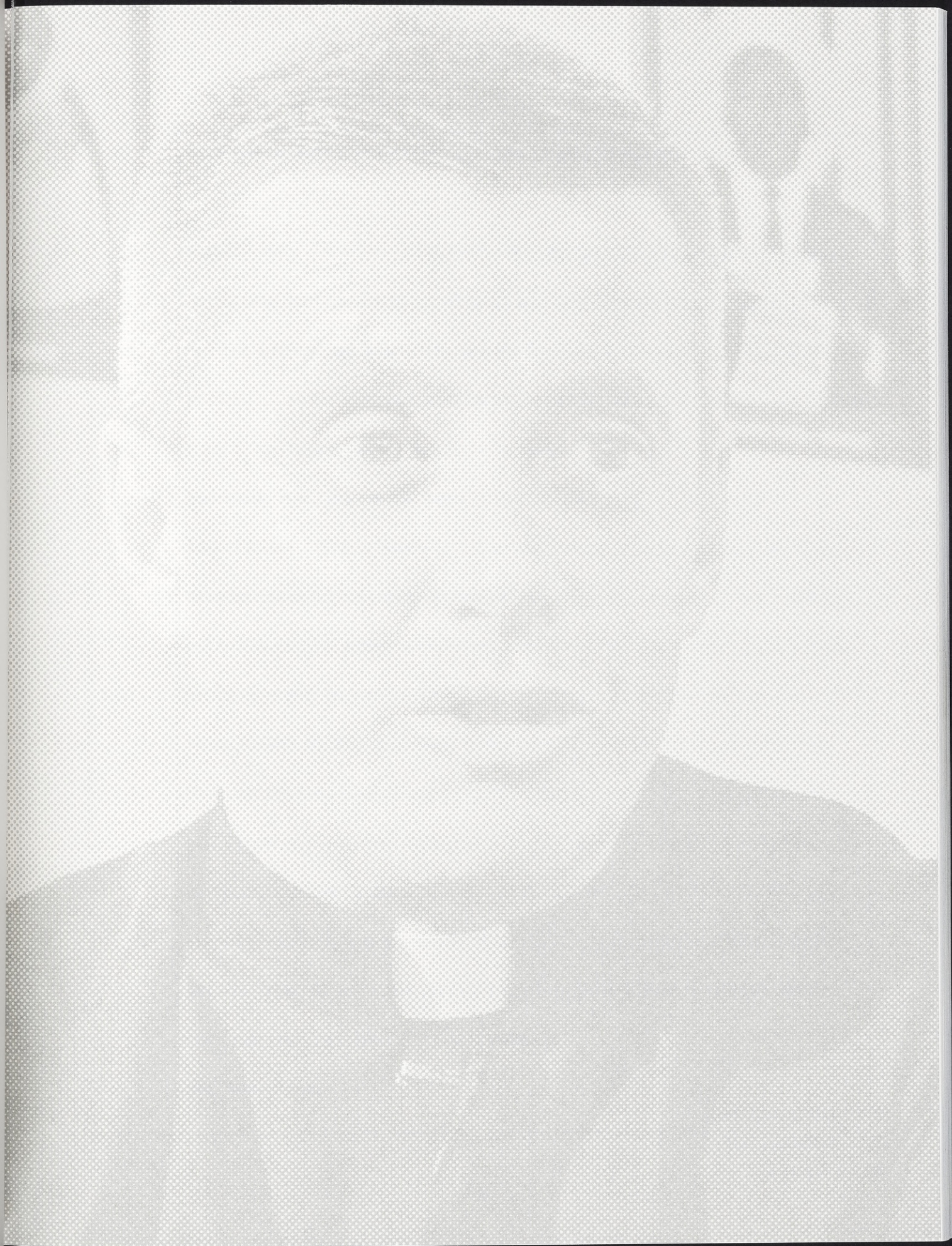

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Aidan McAleenan, 2015

Photo by Matt Dibble

	marksearch_Aidan McAleenan 1/27/2015 Video Transcript
	Father Aidan: My name is Aidan John McAleenan. I am 52 years old. I have been in this neighborhood for about six years now and the parish itself was established in 1898, so I live next door to the church, the second church on the site. It was built in 1898. It's an old Victorian and I live there with another priest who is in residence from Ghana who helps me here in the church.
	Sue Mark: And how did you come to lead this particular congregation?
	Father Aidan: Well, it is kind of interesting. It has a long story to it. I have been an associate pastor, I have been a priest 10 years. Associate pastor in Christ the King out in Pleasant Hill which is kind of the wide burbs but very progressive and social
1:00	justice oriented. So, I had a great first four years and then I was sent for a year to Fremont with another large parish, very multicultural. Then towards the end of that year the bishop asked me to come to Saint Columba and to be honest with you, I knew of it but I had never actually been here before and I probably had inadvertently driven past it but didn't know. So, when he asked me to come and stay here, to be here as the pastor I knew that the previous priest hadn't lived on site. He had lived over Saint Joseph in Berkeley and the house had been rented out. I wanted to be present in the community.
	SM: Why is that?

1:45	**Father Aidan:** Well, I think as a ministry of presence, I think it is being with the people. It is also – it just would have felt better to me than to be living in another community. I just think it was a good thing to do and I moved in immediately and let the house then be part of the community again. It had been rented out to a Jesuit community that was studying theology and it was a community house but now it is a rectory again. **SM:** And what can you tell me about the history of the church? **Father Aidan:** Well, this area, the East Bay, was part of the archdiocese of San Francisco. The parish was carved out of the Sacred Heart parish which is a 40th in telegraph (Phonetics), I think. And Saint Josephs over in Berkeley was carved out between the two parishes as the Catholic community grew. There was a large Irish/ Italian group here. In 1906 a lot of Italians came over after the earthquake. There were a Portuguese number here as well. So, that community, more or less from 1906 to the war, World War II was pretty stable, I think. Then with the war
3:19	effort a lot of black Catholics came up from Louisiana and the south running away from Jim Crow, looking for new opportunities and they brought their faith with them and their families and they began to flourish. **SM:** Sorry to interrupt, but can you mention a little bit the connection between Catholicism, African Americans, Louisiana? **Father Aidan:** Yeah. Black Catholics have always been part of the quilt, the Catholic quilt. They were here with those who began Maryland. They were here in

4:07	Florida with the Spanish. They were here with the French. These are mostly Catholic countries that brought their faith with them. So, the black Catholic experience has definitely always been part and parcel, not huge but definitely a huge element of what we all know as the Louisiana Purchase. So, Catholics have been there. They haven't been very prevalent in their culture because Catholicism
4:40	always seemed like a monoculture for such a long time. It wasn't until after Vatican II in the 60s that they got to express their version of Afrocentric mind, body and soul clapping and joyfulness, and bringing their whole selves to the liturgy and their music and their cultural experience. So, that was the joy of what happened here after 1965, gradually the gospel liturgy and full flavor or black Catholicism flowered here in this parish and the priest that were here. They weren't black, but they certainly saw the need for people to express themselves in their own culture. So, that's what eventually led to Father Paul Vasser came in the 80s and went off to learn how to do more like a Baptist style preaching – went to school for that and one of the Baptist seminaries back east. They really brought a new life to the parish and to the people. The people really embraced it. So, right now, at this point people come from 32 different zip codes. **SM:** Yeah. Can you explain that a little bit? **Father Aidan:** Well, the Catholic Church can be very monoculture and these people would pass a lot of Catholic churches on their way to church here at Saint Columba. First of all, they are going to a place where people look like them. Now it

	is in a church that looks like them culturally and artistically. They embrace the message. They are fed and the other churches are valid, of course, but they don't
6:32	feel as hospitable and warmed and welcomed as they would in a place that feels like their own culture.
	SM: So, when you say 32 zip codes, it's not people who had been living here who moved someplace else?
	Father Aidan: Some of that is true, yeah. Some of the people have moved out to different areas and Saint Columba will always be their home. That's true. But then others have just come searching. The mobility of today, the car, freeways, and Bart and everything else, people go where they're fed. So, it's a combination of people who have moved away who have come back and those from around come searching, church shopping it's called. They come and they stay, and it's a good thing.
	SM: Can you talk about in the church what's present visually that connects it say, to some of the early history and then the current changes?
7:50	**Father Aidan:** This particular building was built in 1960 for $3,500. I saw that recently. It opened on Christmas day in 1962 or maybe it was 1960, but in any case Monsier Wade (Phonetics), an Irish man from the west of Ireland built it. He was a little on the cheap side. I know him because he built the church that I just came from. He just basically built a big box. There was a wooden structure out in the parking lot that burned down. I think it is called holy fire. They didn't have the

	money to remove it but it all of a sudden burned down. I think the house, the lady, the cook in the house came over and told him during mass, "Father, the church is burning down." And he says "Don't bother me know. I am saying my mass." So, I think he was hoping that it would be gone by the time he got out and didn't have to pay for it to be removed. The elements in it, as you can see clearly from the
9:03	window, they're very European. You go around, the different windows are all about the rosary, so it is very much a 50s, 60s church. All of the people of the names of the families that bought them are Irish, they are Italian and they are Portuguese. So, you can see that and you can see that especially with Maria Garetti, which is an Italian saint. But you also have Saint Columba who is Irish, of course and named after the church and he's a 5th century contemporary of Saint Patrick's. Not Columbo, but Columba. There is a thousand years between those two guys. And Saint Peter Clever was a prolific baptizer of black Catholics and Jesuit and Columbia Cartanna (Phonetics), who is a very popular saint. So, you can kind of see that art work all reflects who was here when the church was opened
10:03	back in the pre-Vatican II era. The church is designed that way. The new elements, when I got here six years ago there were four. There was a committee that had looked at renovating for four years and they gave me a list at the first meeting of 12 things that they wanted: new carpet, new paint, I can't remember the other detail work, but nothing had to do with baptism and Eucharist which is two things most central. So, it was at that time that I suggested getting a liturgist, someone

	who is professional, who has studied this and knows what the church wants but also could work with the community to get them to decide and inform them and give Catechetical information that would allow them to make a good decision enough for four years through that education and long process, we were offered three designs. The community had total involvement in it and this is the design the community picked which is more the idea of the community gathered around the alter or around the word as a greater sense of community. Which would be very Afrocentric in its understanding. I, personally, wanted something quite different
11:28	but I was overruled. Catholic church is not a democracy but it is when it comes to the community and their consensus around this. It was a good thing and it was a good process. Everybody had buy-in. The detail of the art work was – some of the art work we already had, so it was really important. You won't see this in Catholic churches, but you'll notice Dr. King is here. My thinking was that the walls should be holy people, not necessarily by acclimation of the people of God who are here. That's how saints actually started out. It wasn't a Vatican ruled or a dictate by them. It was by acclimation of the people. So, Dr. King, even though he is a Baptist is up there and several others who – Dorothy Day is on the other wall and she's white but she is definitely into social justice. And so up on the front of the church we removed a big white corpus on the cross. On every Catholic church you'll see a cross, this one is black and very ideologically African and people are always quite
12:44	taken by that. So, we have attempted to make the church look like the people who

	are sitting in the pews and for them to feel comfortable. **SM:** Can you describe the symbol? **Father Aidan:** Yeah, the symbol over the door and the symbol on the glass on the new doors is that big symbol, the genome is – I made that one myself. **SM:** You made that particular one? **Father Aidan:** I did. Yeah. I was trying to be accepted and loved. They know I am obviously not African American, but that one represents God as the backbone of the world and then the two arms are the God of love blessing the world and holding the world. Then each of the symbols on the doors represent love and peace in West Africa where these symbols come from. Right at the front door as you come in, you have a very visual – the visual impact is huge. You see that there's something different going on here. So, there's that. Then the two statues used to be Italian looking people on our little artists took Joseph and Mary away and they got an Afro and a tan and a little bit of manipulation of their noses and lips. They did a really good job of making them more look like the people that are
14:22	here. **SM:** And those kinds of changes, does that come from the community? **Father Aidan:** No. The actual cost of the renovation was supposed to be $1.5 million but I knew we wouldn't have the resources to gather that and plus, our diesis was to embark on a capital campaign. So, the two things together wouldn't have worked so what we tried to do was work with the resources that we had on

	hand. So, even though we would have had the plan approved by the diesis we didn't have blueprints and we didn't have that level of detail although that was in my head but what I thought we could do and be – like to buy those statues would be you know, six or seven thousand dollars, whereas the artist took them away and did them for $1500. You know. This particular corpus I am told would be worth
15:35	about 65 to 100 thousand dollars and this man did it for $3,500. You should have seen his eyes pop on the day of the blessing of the bishop and I told everybody that and then I turned to him and said "And no, you're not getting the difference between the $3,500 and the $65,000 that is suggested." Then several of my brother priest were very helpful, very artistic. One invited me to take the chairs and make them the color of the windows. The people wanted some pews because it was a more traditional feeling in a church rather than chairs. So, I kept some pews. The stations of the cross are very sort of Caucasian, white centered and I thought I could get black ones, but the people didn't want that. They wanted to keep them and keep them up there, up around the tabernacle.
	SM: So, do you feel like you wanted to make it more Afrocentric than the community wanted?
	Father Aidan: Well, actually, yes. I wanted to – that's a good point. I think I did. I wanted to really prove the point because if you go to Saint Patrick's Church in San
16:50	Francisco or New York, there's absolutely no doubt who worshipped here and who built this place and it has green Connemara marble, it has 32 windows with 32

	saints of the 32 counties of Ireland, there's shamrocks and chalaylies (Phonetics) and all the traveling of Irish Roman Catholicism there and I had the same feeling that this should be that way here for the people who – and it would be a very unusual thing because it has only been a generation or so since Vatican II to allow this enculturation for this particular community. I think we have achieved it. It will be an ongoing process to continue to do that. Even as the community changes, because it has changed a little bit this last while.
17:50	**SM:** Yeah, and I wanted to talk about what you've seen in the recent time that you have been here. What are some of the changes that you've noticed?
	Father Aidan: Well, I think I arrived five, almost six years ago now in the middle of the recession and North Oakland has been traditionally kind of to be considered the hood, as people talk about it here and a lot of violence, a lot of crime. Outside the door of the rectory and the church we had prostitutes 24/7. It's actually not good to call them prostitutes. They're human trafficked people, is really what you need to say because a lot of times they're not doing it voluntarily. But you could not get involved, pimps would show you their guns and you couldn't talk to the girls. Initially I did try to do that but the priest said, "Father, we don't need a dead priest." You know, and "We know what you're trying to do but it is not helpful." So, you would have that 24/7 and you would hear gunshots on a regular basis right around the neighborhood. Since that time and since the recession has gotten better what we've seen is the gentrification of the areas, especially since the big

	apartment buildings that have been built in Emeryville, which is a block away and in Berkeley which is just a few blocks away. So, what you find is a lot of new people moving in but it is also pushing out a lot of the poorer African American folk and in addition to all of that, these businesses that have been filling in these store fronts, you have more foot traffic and in this last maybe six months to a year the prostitutes, or sex workers, or sex traffic people have moved. They haven't gone.
19:55	They have moved somewhere else. And it actually feels nice not to have that going on all the time. We would regularly have all sorts of things happening and sometimes you'd see some of the girls standing there late at night with nothing on them much and the cold, and then they'd disappear with somebody and you'd kind of worry if they didn't come back to soon, or they didn't come back at all you'd be wondering what could've happened to them. Because that's somebody's mother, somebody's sister, somebody's relative –a child of someone. That's how I looked at it. So, the neighborhood really has changed. We can see it and actually, I
20:36	didn't want to be presiding over the demise of the Afrocentric liturgy, or have other people from other parishes come here to see me because I don't like these cult of priests. You do get that sometimes where people from other parishes will follow you, "We love Father Aidan," sort of thing. We did get some of that but what's happening is a lot of people are coming in from the neighborhood and liking what they see and hear and feel, especially the social justice oriented elements in the parish and the progressive message of the gospel in tune with

	Pope Francis. You know, compassion and love, and inclusivity, and focusing in on people and community, and the idea of "I am because we are." And we're all in this together and it is not just about church. It is about taking it out. So, last year during the election I said "You will vote. You will vote for proposition 47 because that's what Christ would do. And you will vote for N, and Z, and A, because these are things that will help young men be educated and community policing. All of these things will help the community. So, we're part of OCO, Oakland Community Organization and we've been a focus for social justice in this city. It's a bigger
22:10	reputation than maybe we enjoy. A bigger reputation than might be fair, but –
	SM: I want to talk about this social justice part, but before we move to far away from gentrification can you give me a definition of like what your working definition of gentrification is?
	Father Aidan: My view of gentrification is that it is a good thing. It is a good thing to have less crime. It is a good thing to not have gun violence, and it's a good thing not to have human traffic people outside your front door 24/7. The other side of that coin is that a lot of poor people have been pushed out and the community loses some of the culture and flavor and color that it did have. That's being lost, I
23:06	think and feel. That part doesn't feel good but it also does feel good to be in a safer environment and everybody wants that both for their children and in other ways. So, I don't know what the balance in all of that is, I know more people are coming in from San Francisco with money because it's so expensive over there and

	we are getting something good back, but there is also a negative. There is a downside to it as well. Then all the services that are – there is a new gym that opened up up the road, like a block away. All of these commercial spaces are filled in. It feels more active and alive but it's also diverse and I like that. The diversity is greater. **SM:** Do you see people who are saying "I am new to the neighborhood"? **Father Aidan:** Yes. A lot. Especially these new big buildings that are being constructed all over the area. **SM:** And how is that shifting the diversity of the congregation? (24:1.4) **Father Aidan:** Well, I think when I arrived it was about 80/20.
24:21	**SM:** 80/20? **Father Aidan:** Eighty percent African American, twenty percent just a whole bunch of other people. Now I would say it is more like fifty-five/sixty and forty/ forty-five of others. Like Sunday I was actually looking and I thought we're doing an African American series for Dr. King's birthday all the way through the middle of February and you could really see there was a strong African American presence but there also was a lot of everybody else but then people come instead because they love the inclusivity of the community and the idea that you get to celebrate in the way that we do. It is infectious. It is the sort of liturgy where you come in and if you're feeling bad you kind of leave feeling lifted, that you'd been with people and that you'd celebrated.

25:17	**SM:** So, now can we talk more about the social justice (Inaudible) maybe why that's important to you? **Father Aidan:** It's very important to me because I grew up in a war zone in Northern Ireland and was a second class citizen in a country that Britain had created that was the Protestant majority, %60, held all the power, held all of the power in the government and the policing and so Catholics had nothing and were kept that way. It wasn't actually until Dr. King, started protesting in the south and the Civil Rights movement that Northern Irish Catholics, especially students went out onto the streets and started looking for the same equal rights, not to end British rule in Ireland but just to have equal rights. That's how that war started and it became something else. Dr. King wouldn't have liked the war that unfolded. But
26:28	we have peace. But I grew up in the middle of that with a big Irish family of 57 cousins, and 18 aunts and uncles, so very community oriented all around the church. So, there was always the Saint Vincent De Paul's Society. There was always these different church groups around. When I came to the states AIDS had just – the epidemic was raging in the mid-80s. And Catholic charities opened its first AIDS hospice. I was the first manager/ administrator August 22, 1988 at 9:00 a.m., I will never forget it. I was totally frightened. We took 32 people off the streets of San Francisco who were HIV triply diagnosed and were formally homeless. I did that for five years. I wasn't studying for the priesthood then but I felt it was like a ministry. All of that time, too, I was a person without papers. So, it was not just Latinos and

27:37	others, it was many of us who were in the midst of all of that. But social justice and taking care of those that have less than we have, that was always very important to me. That's how I was brought up. That was my experience. So, coming to Saint Columba there was this nice sense of what they were doing and who they were and how I fit into it. So, it was a real gift to me to be part of the community that was so much part of that. We also have the crosses that are outside in the garden. Unfortunately, this year already we have two. But father Jason Lindaso (Phonetics) was the (28:08.3) was the fire department and the police department in Oakland and Berkeley chaplain and 10 years ago he started planted crosses to memorialize all of the homicides. I think it got up to 150 or something at the height of it. Two years ago it was 121. Last year it was 97. This year just gone was 85. So, each year it is starting to come down. And you can see the difference between the social justice work with OCO, these numbers in this community investment helps to bring
28:50	the numbers down and then the Catholic charities. **SM:** What kind of actions though, do you think specifically are helping? **Father Aidan:** The actions that we have taken have been very much involved in the political process that people have power and that the vote is important for everyone. So, if everyone gets out and votes for these social justice oriented measures, we're very lucky in California to have that, really makes a huge difference. If more young men of color are in the school system and they have the resources, and they have good teachers, and as much as they do in the hills, and

	they get to go to college, and then you break that cycle. Whereas the rate of recidivism in and out of the jail system is the other end of that coin that is just really, really sad. Then they become second class citizens because they go into jail, they end up in federal, state or the local prison system and then they come out and they can't vote. They can't get public housing. They can't – they have to check the box that they've been in jail and then they are back out and hanging with their homeboys and getting into trouble. The rate of recidivism is very high. But we intend to break that cycle by how we participate in the community. So, Saint Columba's been at the forefront of all that and then those numbers of those crosses go down and you can see that quite literally happen before our eyes and it really makes us want to do more. OCO, Oakland Community Organization is 70
30:46	different congregations: Jewish, Muslim, all the different shades of Christianity, and other faith traditions all working together for the same goal. The basics, education, a roof over your head, the right to work and the ability to flourish in your family, and the right to your own determination. These are the basics that are part of Catholic social teaching and it merges so easily with all the other faith traditions because we're all people of the Book of Abraham, the day of the Muslims, Christians and the Jewish people. **SM:** Can you talk about how the church is involved with the immediate community? **Father Aidan:** We're a presence in the local community. Our Saint Vincent De Paul

31:53	society has expanded dramatically over this last year so we provide three times a week food and bags of food for those who are hungry. Recently we helped out with Obama Care in getting people registered. We also act as a resource to all of the different other non-profit groups in the area and social services. The people who come to the door from the neighborhood don't care if you're Catholic, don't care if you're Baptist, they don't care if you're – they just need help and that's the important thing. And, actually, the church down the street which is Baptist came over and started a Saint Vincent De Paul in their church. Now, as an Irish Catholic that blew me out of the water when their bishop came and asked me could they do it. I am like "Absolutely" you know, who cares at the end of the day to use this model of service delivery to the poor because here comes everybody, as James Joyce would say, the famous Irish author who was part of the churches. Well, people, here comes everybody and they get what they need. You know, for them to do it as well is a really good thing. I don't think we have a huge impact in the
33:09	neighborhood. Our bell rings 12:00 and 6:00 every day so when it doesn't ring people complain that it isn't ringing because they sort of guide their day by it and it's a nice call. The bell rings for the evangelists, which is the angel of Gabriel who appeared to Mary and made the announcement to her and that's what that signal is in all Catholic churches that have bells. It's obviously more important in Europe than it is here but people like it. We also are a resource politically in the area. Our hall is constantly used by people doing wedding receptions, repasses after

	funerals, not just for ourselves but for other people. Quinceañera's, there's a lot of Latinos in the neighborhood so they come and rent the hall. We have 140 kids that come and do Judo a couple times a week and we have FA, NA and AA free to the neighborhood. And we have an after school's ESL program that we use in our balcony here for a group of Silesian (Phonetics) brothers who used to be down at a different parish but couldn't afford the rent any more. So, we give them space to do free ESL classes. Thinking about it, I think we don't have a lot to do but actually we do. We have quite a big influence in the neighborhood and we do participate. We hope to do more because there is a lot of different groups that have been to The Place next door, the sustainable living place. We work with them quite a bit.
	SM: What do you do with them?
34:55	**Father Aidan:** Well, we have done some plantings around the neighborhood and clean-ups, and also there's several festivals coming up that they're very actively involved in and our goals are the same. Then on the other side of us there's Rebuilding Oakland, a non-profit group and another group providing solar energy to low income people. In addition to that we have two HUD housing, federal housing authorities that we sponsored across the street for about 140 seniors in two different buildings. We don't get any resources from them, but we provide affordable housing, section 8 housing for seniors. So, actually the more I think about it – then our school was used from 1927, was run by Irish presentation sisters and of course in the 70s- 80s it closed by lack of numbers and we created a

	deanery school of four parishes. The building lay empty and we now have it rented to a charter school, Yo Ming which is a Chinese immersion school and that's growing and growing. So, we get the rent of the school which helps the ministry of the parish which we couldn't do without. Yeah, we really do have quite an impact. It's not that you think about it, or someone asks a question like you asked like, oh
36:19	wow, we actually do have quite an impact. We could have a bigger impact too, though.
	SM: That's what I wanted to ask you in terms of your vision for the future and as you're seeing the demographic of the neighborhood changing, what do you think you can do to say, preserve the sense of community that has been built here?
	Father Aidan: It's funny you should ask that question because it came up at our parish council the other night. We have a representative number of about 14 people elected by the peers and the community. That is a question that I have been struggling with because as we continue to grow as a community, as we find ourselves doing more outreach the question then becomes if there are more white and Asian and Latinos in the neighborhood and they're going to church then there appears to be less African Americans. So, if we do outreach, you know, if we did
37:30	mailing, did door-to-door or any of the different techniques you would to bring your neighborhood here, then the danger, for want of a better word, would be that all of those people would come and your mix might be 50/50. So the tipping point – the question became for the (Inaudible 37:39.8) council, and it is a diverse

	parish council ethnically, what would be the tipping point where the African American part would go away. And that's a very hard question to answer. I think we would have to be – what they thought is that what we would need to do a two-prong thing, we need to reach out to the Black Catholic community, but there is no one point of service to see them or get to them. **SM:** What do you mean by that? **Father Aidan:** Well, it might be seen as poaching from the other churches who may not appreciate that and saying "Look at us. We're better than them" for the Black Catholic experience. Because some people just like being in their own church no matter where that is and that's okay too. But being able to see – we see ourselves as the premier Afrocentric church in the diesis of Oakland. But it's always been very mixed. If you've been over to Saint Benedicts which is on Foothill, 80th and Foothill, I think, it's very traditional, almost 90 percent black but it is very traditional Catholic. It wouldn't be as either diverse or as gospel oriented. They're
39:25	a lot more traditional. I think that's the most diplomatic way to put it. I hope that answers your question. **SM:** So, it seems like being in touch with the change and constantly monitoring it – **Father Aidan:** Well, that's how you can do one of two things, at least as I saw it when I spoke to the parish council, you could be proactive and discuss it and look at the different ways to get involved and they thought of a two-prong way to touch on it, or you could just let it wash over you and be passive and just see

40:24	where the chips fell. I prefer to be proactive and engage it as opposed to let it wash over us and then not be able to plan, or not be able to engage it. I think also, you know, you're preaching and everything but the parish would change as well. It's a bit like last week someone installed this Internet camera for streaming. It's right there. I am a little anxious about it because that camera goes all the way to the Vatican and it goes all the way to anywhere in the world for anyone who would object to this type of liturgy. So, I think sometimes I would be a little more reticent to say the things that I would otherwise say because I know I am just talking to this community and you can say things to the black community about the black community in the black community that you would not say in the white burbs, in the privilege of white America. You know, so it's different. The message could be different. I think I would be – so we are trying to have an impact for people who want to participate in the liturgy, or are sick or in bed and all of that really good reasoning, but an unintended consequence might be that you might not take as
41:45	many risks as you would if that camera wasn't there. **SM:** Well, it really changes what community means, right? **Father Aidan:** It expands it but it also has unintended consequences and yes, because a few Sunday's ago we had a woman from the Cameroon (Phonetics 41:59.1) preach and in here gesticulation, and in her excitement she used a bad word, you know. So, I said to them, "Well, we need at least a 30-second delay on this. Somebody needs to be able to push a button, like at the Academy Awards –

	not that I am equating liturgy of Saint Columba with the Academy Awards, but you know what I mean? They need to be able to have a little bit of control over it. That 30 seconds might be enough to avert disaster.
	SM: What other kinds of things do you think people might object to that happen here?
	Father Aidan: I think sometimes we challenge the church's perception of things. We are also very much about – there is after Vatican II, pre-Vatican II church was
43:08	very much about the church is the perfect society and so it was very much a hierarchal idea and the church was seen and it's priest and bishops, and you know that whole hierarchy thing, after Vatican II the script was flipped and the idea is more that the church is the people of God, meaning everyone. So, we constantly emphasize the church is the people of God and the idea of the sense of fidelo (Phonetics), which means it's Latin for the sense of the people. So, you could ask the question, "What's the church's attitude towards contraception," for example. Well, in the United States 99% of people have already decided that. So, the church has this position and you can hear it theologically, spiritually and philosophically argued but the people have already decided it. Then what we say is "You take your conscience and you pray about it and think about it, and informed conscience and you hear what the church teaches, here is what the bible says, here is what my prayer says" and then you make the decision and then that is between you and
44:27	God. That has always been a part of the church tradition but with an educated

	population, you know, people have the right to make between God and themselves and all of the influences. You are going to hear that more often than you are going to – that you might not hear somewhere else. The other thing about our –and I forgot to mention it is the Black Catholic experience here is that Catholic education has made a huge difference. The experience of Black Catholics in these parishes has been. Where was I? Oh, education, a lot of these young Black Catholics went to these inexpensive private Catholic schools and are now the leaders of today. They are the people who are the doctors, the lawyers, the nurses, the educators and we can see that here so they've risen up into the middle class and they are contributors to the congregation. So, we're not a poor black parish. We are very much a middle class black parish and one example is Dr. Cynthia La Blanc who went to the presentation school, went to Holy Names and went on to college, was the head of the Richmond school district as an educator. Her mother and father died of cancer, so she got involved in the American Cancer Association. Last year she was the first woman and the first black woman to be president of the American Cancer Association. She typifies what good Catholic education can do and has done in the generations that have come. That's a little hoorah for Catholic education. And other people like Ron Dellums who wasn't Catholic but went to Saint Patrick's and went on to be in Congress, came back and was our mayor and
46:45	would speak lovingly and caringly about his Catholic upbringing at Saint Patrick's in West Oakland. Catholic education has been another wonderful contribution to the

	community but to the community at large, I think. **SM:** Well, I think we have covered all the main points that I want to touch on. Is there anything else that you feel you want to say? **Father Aidan:** Well, the only thing I would say is that the community is growing and Father Jason Lindaso, when he left six years ago, he said he thought the best days of Saint Columba lay ahead of it. And I really believed that. I think the renovated space and the fact that we're not in debt and that we came in well under budget, and we're able to celebrate in a beautiful space that's Afrocentric but still honors the past, the two are beautifully married together and I think people feel it when they come and it's about hospitality. I have seen a big number
47:55	of lesbian and gay couples come into church and they feel very comfortable but it really looks like here comes everybody. I love that part that Joyce says that all can feel welcome. That's a good thing and to have an impact that what we do here in this hour and a half really makes a difference out in the community from a loving, caring, building up what God wants, that's respect for all people and so ... **SM:** Matt, do you want to throw in a question? **Matt Dibble** (videographer): I think it was really well covered, everything. **SM:** We didn't talk about this piece here. **Father Aidan:** That would be a good thing to talk about. **SM:** We can get some detail shots of the key features because that was an interesting story.

49:28	**Father Aidan:** When we started the renovation, we only had $250,000 in the bank from a seal of a piece of realty of these HUD houses across the street and so we had $250,000, that's how we started the process of the renovation and then I was working down at the old cathedral. Well, the old cathedral fell down in '89 and then they moved to old Saint Mary's, which the original Catholic church in Oakland from the 1850s or '60s, something like that. It's down on Jefferson and 10th, I think. It was sitting there vacant after they moved into the new cathedral that we have, Christ the Light. And a lot of the old patrimony of the dieses and artwork was still sitting there because it didn't fit into the new cathedral. So, one of those things was an altar that had been commissioned and I asked the priest in charge, I said "What are you going to do with that?" he said, "Well, I don't know what to do with it," because it's a Protestant organization that are going to have it and Pentecostal, and I said "Oh, they won't want it." I said, "Can I have it?" He said, "If you can get it out of here it's yours." So, it's Mathew, Mark, Luke and John the four gospel evangelist and it is done in solid marble. So, I asked two or three Rastafarian guys from down the street, you would have gotten a contact high just from smelling their breath, and they said "We'll get it over here for $2000." I says "I don't care how you do it." It's a ton and a half. I didn't watch them do it but they got it here and then we recycled all of the old stuff of the church which is really nice. The tabletop from the old, high altar on the back wall and we put that on top of it so that so that recycled that and made that sacredness and connectedness.

51:14	We placed it there in the middle of the renovation and probably the most poignant moment of the entire renovation process was the Sunday when we had Sister Mary Anne Castolouci (Phonetics 51:16.2) preach and I said to her, "Why don't we have the people bless the alter?" She said "What a beautiful idea." And so, before she began her preaching she asked all the people, everyone in the church to come forward. They played some music and you bless it whatever way you think you should bless it. Well, it was the most powerful, moving thing because people automatically knew what to do and it was all people came up, touched it, put their head on it, blessed it, made the sign of the cross, kissed it; everybody did something that they felt comfortable with. So, even though the bishop came a year later and blessed it officially, it was well blessed by the people that were here.
52:16	That was a very beautiful story. It was very emotional, very powerful liturgy that just organically came from the people themselves. **SM:** There's something that you haven't mentioned on film that you made a point of telling me, and I think it's really important, that you didn't close the church at all and so, can you maybe state that and tell how you were able to do that? **Father Aidan:** If we had of gotten a capital campaign for $1.5 million we would have had to have a contractor, and blueprints, and all sorts of official elements that would come together when you're doing a renovation like this. A construction company and a general contractor, insurance wise would never let you be in the church well they were doing their work, from a safety perspective. So, how we did

53:31	it was every week we would work all week long, myself included, and wherever the church was, on Saturday morning a group came in and cleaned, and put plants in, and if the floor was half done we would put a big rug around it and we were able to have church every weekend. The other alternative would've been with a contractor would have been to be in the hall, to have all the liturgy and all the things that we do in the hall and that would've been very, very difficult but what we were able to do was just use the space. The other beautiful thing about it was people look forward to coming to church to see what was the next thing that was done. So, it became very exciting for people. On the Sunday, the weekend I installed those doors, there were just 6'6-foot wooden, solid doors and then we had 9-foot doors, glass that let the light in and you see the world come through the doors and people could see it. I didn't have the money for those doors and I
54:36	told the people I didn't but they could see them and I said "You have rights to these doors, rights for parents, loved ones, I need eight checks for $6000, and by the end of that one weekend I had eight checks for $6000 because people could see it, feel it, touch it. It wasn't a concept we were talking about. As each week came along –
	SM: What is the pushback though with the doors because you had told me there was kind of a pushback with having glass verses –
	Father Aidan: Oh, well, people were a little shocked to put glass on Saint Pablo because it was seen as the hood and somebody would smash it or, like in the

55:47	rectory a prostitute came through the glass doors one time running away from a John and another time from a pimp so people could remember these stories and thinking, glass on the church door just seems something you do in the burbs but nothing has happened to them and it is really, really beautiful. It sort of beautified the church and when you are celebrating you can see the world as going by and people can come in and it feels welcoming and it's beautiful too. Lastly, we did recycle nearly everything that we have. All the old stuff was used in the church. The old high altar is black Italian marble and we used that in the baptismal font. We use the trim around the baltikino (Phonetics 56:10.7) which was kind of around the corpus gold picture framing wood and we used that around the saints here and, of course, the (Inaudible) are reused and so we tried really hard to keep the good and the patrimony of the old art work and marry the two together. So, I think that's good. The tabernacle is from – was originally here where we keep the consecrated bread and the tabernacle here we'd keep the bread and that was on the old high altar. So, we just made a pedestal or a crown for it and the lovely thing
57:13	is the light over the tabernacle was from Dublin, Ireland. I was in a shop in Dublin that does old ecclesiastical stuff and a priest was with me and I fell in love with this old style sanctuary lamp and it was 3000 euros but this priest bought it for us and shipped it to me and I never was as happy when I opened that box and saw what he had sent. It is kind of a marrying of the old and the new. The other element is having the – you won't see this in a Catholic church usually, is the book of the

58:30	gospels thrown over on the wall with a light beside it, which is Christ or God present in the word, present in the Eucharist. Lastly, we put a very modern thing, we upgraded our song system to be state of the art and we also added the audio and visuals. So, on the four walls of the church on the corners we have the words for the celebration of the songs. So, everybody's head is lifted up instead of down at a piece of paper. They were also able to do little video clips that are current so they really connect people into what's going on in the music. So, it is very modern but it's also very ancient. Very ancient and very modern married together and it works really well. **SM:** Just a question, you know, thinking about the modernity component, what's the age range of the members of the – **Father Aidan:** Well, the age range, I think it would be greater if we had the school and the school was part of us. That always makes a big difference to the topography of a parish. Ours tends to be a little older. There is not a huge amount of younger people but that often happens, you have school age children in the school that participate to get their baptism for holy communion then they had to go to high school and you had to lose them all for a while until they have their own families and then they come back because you kind of have that sort of hatched matched and dispatched idea of church, so people come back, sort of C of E Catholics, the Christmas and Easter people that come and you hope that some of them might stay but demography tends to be middle age and more but I do see
59:50	

1:00:55	younger people coming in from the neighborhood. That's a vitality that is also happening and ethnically very diverse too, which is a good thing. **SM:** Well, that's great. I am glad that you brought in about all the different aspects of what you changed. **Father Aidan:** There's only just one last thing. There's quite a large Latino population in the neighborhood and I can see them present and the will ask me "Father, why don't you have Spanish Mass?" That is another issue when you have chosen to be Afrocentric because the moment you would chose to do a Spanish mass in addition to what we've already done, you also have to do services to them through Spanish. So, the other parishes around take care of that and I've also felt a little guilty about that because, you know, I would love to be able to do it but I can see what the implications of it would be very quickly, all the other resources would be needed to take care of them. Also, you would need a Spanish speaking priest or deacon and then you would need to have all the Baptists in confirmation, first communion confirmation classes in Spanish and then you would have a whole lot more Quinceañera, which is a celebration where a girl becomes 15 and it could really overpower things very quickly and you would lose the Afrocentricness of the church and that would be a bad thing since this is one of the few that we have and they have lots of possibilities in other areas. **Matt Dibble:** I have a question. **Father Aidan:** But we do have the Virgin of Guadalupe out here. We had to put

	her in because the young Latinos who were working on the church would ask, "Is this a Catholic church?" And I am "Yeah," "Well, you don't have the Virgin of Guadalupe." So, I made sure I put her up and I made sure that they knew it was Catholic. That's why she's at the front door and people can see immediately that she's present.
1:02:25	**Matt Dibble:** So, you can look at Sue when you answer. I am interested, so the original transition from Irish and Portuguese and Italian to African American. I know you weren't here but from stories you've heard, can you just describe how that unfolded and how did this become – I mean, I am sure it became more of an African majority church before it became an Afrocentric church, but that whole transition, was it –
1:03:30	**Father Aidan:** Well, the change from an Afro to more Afrocentric liturgy or (Inaudible 1:02.53.4) after Vatican II, but the people arrived in the area for work during the war and to get away from the Jim Crow and the unequal treatment that they experienced in the south and then a few would come and they would bring their families when they made enough money and then they bought houses down here on the flatlands. Of course, back then there were only certain neighborhoods that you could buy and if you were black and in this area you could but there were parts of Berkeley that you couldn't and parts of the Oakland hills where you couldn't and Piedmont where you absolutely couldn't. So, they congregated in areas where they couldn't rent and purchase and then after Vatican II there was a

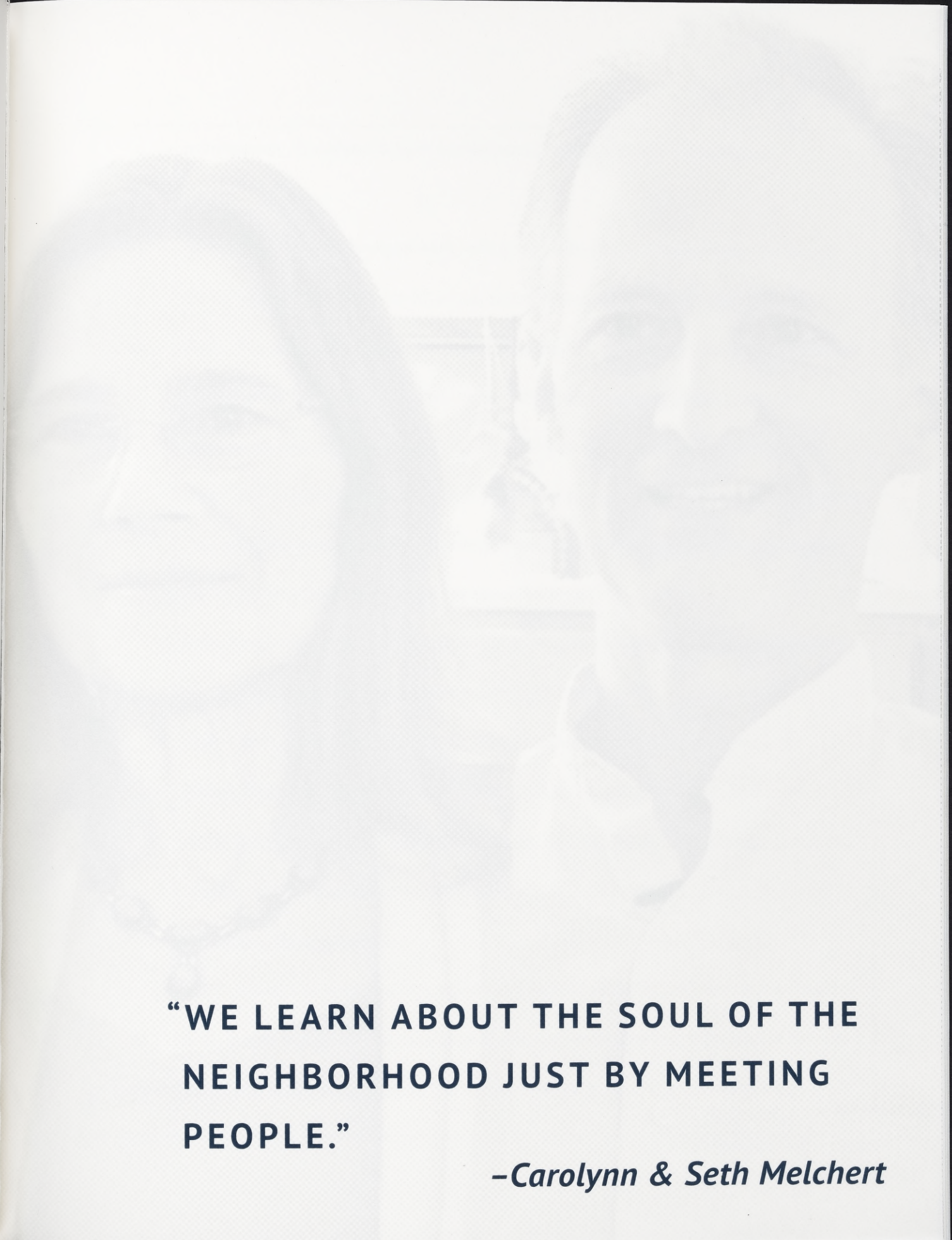
	need for enculturation; there was the need for celebrating within their own right and that was encouraged by the church and by the local priests that were here and saw the need, and investigated it, and educated themselves, and started the choir and then gradually became the liturgy that we celebrate today.
	SM: So, there weren't stories of tensions, or splits?
	Father Aidan: Not that I am aware of. Not that I have ever been. I am sure there are things like that that did happen. I have often heard and seen, myself, in
1:04:49	Catholic churches where you have a huge Latino population and then you have a huge local Caucasian, white American or white Europeans and it's a very different – their idea of church is very different and very Euro-centered whereas Latinos are – Latinos tend to be caught in Good Friday and a lot of the sort of pain and suffering and that's why you see these bloody Jesus' and dead Christ's at Easter and The Mother of Sorrow, you know. It is all of that stuff. Their devotions are very different but every culture brings something very – that's the universality of the church that every culture has the right to bring their culture to the floor and celebrate it but be informed by the gospel ultimately. I am not sure if culture comes first. Gospel comes first in my mind and then the other stuff celebrates that and enculturates it or embodies it and then the local community.
1:06:00	**Matt Dibble:** Could you describe just briefly what it's like here on a Sunday? What's the liturgy? What's the music, the choir? How does it sound?
	Father Aidan: Well, actually it is interesting. There are three different liturgies

1:08:00	here at Saint Columba. The 4:00 O'clock mass is Saturday evening; it's a vigil mass. I don't know anywhere else in the diocese has it at 4:00, most the time it's at 5:00. But it tends to be more traditional. It's all over and done invested in an hour and they don't mess around. The music tends to be more gospel oriented this last couple of years and we've given it more resources and people love that. The morning mass at 8:00 O'clock tends to be a little on the traditional side. We don't have a choir. We just have a few people leading, countering and it usually last about an hour depending on the preaching. But the 10:30, that would be half to 2/3 packed church. The 10:30 is fully packed; it is a huge gospel choir of about 25-30 people. We have the piano, the drums, you can see this set up in a Baptist church. The music tends to be highly spirited and the gospel spirituals, and gospel oriented music. Every now and again some traditional Catholic, old style Catholic stuff is there but it's very animated. The preaching is animated. The proclamation of the word is animated. You could walk in feeling bad, you know, life unfolds sometimes and you just are not – but you couldn't leave that way. You would always be uplifted. There's great energy, great hospitality. Our sign of peace – most Catholic churches it last two or three minutes. People turn to their left and their right and in this church you shake hands with everybody who is at church. So, as the priest or presider, you have to go up and down the aisles and shake hands with everyone. I kiss most people. I grew up in a very affectionate family so I really enjoy connecting with people. That last about 15 minutes and it is not in the same

	place as every other Catholic church. We do it after our prayers of the faithful. Every other Catholic church does it after the Our Father. I think it works better here and no one has asked us to change it so I am very happy. We've been doing it for 30-something years. So, but overall it is a very uplifting liturgy and the message is good, and preaching is good, and there's a lot of work put into it and it all works, most the time, seamlessly and when it doesn't work seamlessly, we make it look like it works seamlessly. It is all good.
	Matt Dibble: Is there actually call-in response?
1:09:27	**Father Aidan:** Yes. We do have call-in response but, you know, I haven't got into too much of that because it is very much a Baptist. We've been accused of being Baptist Catholics. Our people don't like that. It is definitely very, a very Afrocentric experience and they like that. Now and again I try it but I don't easily do it whereas some of the other pastors who are priests and preachers, who are from that tradition. Because you have to be yourself at the end of the day because people can smell when you're not being authentic. Every now and again I'll do a call-in response in the Father Aidan style and since I am a big extravert, it is very easy for me to engage them and when they don't engage me back I will start to stand in the middle and put my hands on my hips, "What did I say?" and they'll try to engage me as much as they can or understanding what I am trying to say or do. So, call-in response, it depends on the preacher but they would be very quick to do it.
1:10:38	**SM:** We'll just have to come.

1:12:02	**Father Aidan:** Yeah, you need to come at 10:30 and just feel it. Like this Sunday will be off the hook because there's a woman theologian, a black woman from Atlanta is coming. She is a theologian. Last week we had – oh, last week was off the hook. The priest was a Jesuit. He's 64 years old. He's 6'4, very quiet guy and when he got up and started, he just stood there. I walk around everywhere. I can't stay in one place, but he was preaching from there and he started off "I used to be twerking." And I was sitting over there and thinking "Oh Lord! I hope he knows what that means" because all I could think of was Beyonce you know gettin down and doing her twerking dancing thing. So, he went on to say that in college he was twerkin', you know he didn't care what anyone thinks, you're just getting down, look at me, you don't care what anybody thinks. You are just gettin down, "Look at me. I am the most important person in the world." And then all of a sudden he goes "You people know I don't twerk. I couldn't take this big, round 6'4 body down and twerk. It's a metaphor." Then he went on to explain what the metaphor meant and it was great. But I was seriously worried for a minute because I was thinkin, "Lord, I hope he knows what that word means because I have never heard it in this context before." But it really got people connected and he went on to say, "You know, when you're in college you think you are the center of the world. You know everything. You know, you're into sex, rock and roll, drinking, hanging out and doing all the things you do in college" because you are away from your family and that's what he called twerking. Like there was a big emptiness in his life and a

1:13:01	friend of his brought him to church and that's when he got filled in a different way and became altruistic as opposed to self-centered. So, it was a great envoy and people could hear it, you know. He called Jesus a doctor and of course they went into song, some of those old Negro spirituals, Dr. Jesus and some of them I don't know. I am always learning. **(Audio Ends)**



"WE LEARN ABOUT THE SOUL OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD JUST BY MEETING PEOPLE."

–Carolynn & Seth Melchert

"We learn about the soul of the neighborhood just by meeting people."

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PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Carolynn & Seth Melchert, 2015

Photo by Matt Dibble

	marksearch_ Carolynn & Seth Melchert 1/14/2015 Video Transcript
	Carolynn: Hi. I am Carolynn Melchert and I've lived in this area on the border of Oakland and Emeryville for 27 years, since, what was it 1986?
00:18	**Seth:** We moved in in '88. I am Seth Melchert. We bought this house in '87 and we bought it for $90,000 and at that time that was outrageously high price. The woman we bought it from paid 45,000 for it like eight years before and people shook their heads in disbelief that we'd spend so much money on a house. I figured this is a great place to raise a family and we'd be here for the long haul, and we'd be happy here and that was worth the price.
	Sue Mark: How did you first come to this neighborhood, because I remember you saying that you were here before you bought the house?
	Seth: Yeah, I was – I visited the city yoga meditation Ashram up here on the corner. They moved in in, I want to say '75, 1975 they bought the old Stanford Hotel that was very decrepit and run down, and known as a very dangerous place. On the corner was a biker bar and it was –
	Carolynn: Havey's Saloon.
	Seth: Havey's Saloon and that was in the days when Emeryville was still a rough and tumble industrial city, heavy steel, heavy manufacturing, still some of the old beef rendering plants were in the neighborhood. So the Ashram found an

01:52	opportunity in setting up there in the mid-70s and I started coming a few years later and it was a very exciting and potent place and a lot of intense interests, people studying meditation. **SM:** Can you talk a little bit about why the Ashram chose that location, what you know about that? **Seth:** There's sort of a funny story where the founder Yoga Swami Muktananda (Phonetics 2:19.4), this Indian man who didn't even speak any English, they were walking in Berkeley saying "How are we going to find a place to buy" and they saw some realtor sign that had an Indian name, and said "Oh, this has an Indian name; this is a good person to see" and they happened to know that the Stanford Hotel was for sale so they bought it. He said "What use is an Ashram out away in the countryside away from the city where people can't get to? We need to be right in the middle of the city where everyone can come, not just an elite group of people." And the first time I ever came here there was a drunk outside in the street lolling
03:04	around and I was really repulsed. I thought what kind of place is this for a Yoga Ashram. You know, it was gritty and tough and, anyway, it was the Ashram that brought us here and there was a lot of people started buying houses in this neighborhood but it was very rundown and houses were very affordable. So, for a number of years I actually worked as a carpenter for various people who bought houses to fix them up to bring them out of disrepair to move into. **SM:** When did that start to happen? So the Ashram came in 1972?

	Seth: '75. People started moving in almost immediately and you could almost look at a radius of influence that spread out a half block, you know, in the first two, three years. Maybe a one block radius but the late '70s. By the early '80s there was probably a three block radius in which there were a lot of people associated with the Ashram moving in.
	SM: Where were people coming from?
	Seth: All over the world, really. Australia, L.A., New York, there was people from all
04:21	over the world and Muktananda traveled around a lot and he had quite an entourage and people would come through here and say "Oh, I will settle here." So, there was a real intense social connectivity in those early days of the Ashram, kind of a fervor and it was really easy to participate in that.
	SM: Can you describe a little bit about what those activities were, what went on in the Ashram and what people were coming for?
	Carolynn: Well, it was a community gathering but there were courses too, meditation courses and intensives which were, you know, whole week long courses of silence, meditation and chanting, and yoga classes were offered too. There's a café, wonderful vegetarian food and Seth was there for some years before we met and he's the one who introduced me so he was there when Muktananda was coming through and he can describe more of that.
	Seth: I think it's worth mentioning, there was an ineffable potency; the atmosphere was so sacred, so thick with meditation. It was almost like you could

	spoon it out. It was so thick. You just walk in and even people who know nothing about mysticism, about spirituality, about meditation, they would walk in and
06:04	maybe they'd start to cry. They would feel their heart just melting in love. Maybe they start seeing light everywhere. Maybe they just pull inside of themselves and have a cosmic experience. The atmosphere of the place had a quality that, an energy that drew people powerfully and so there was something it transcended social categories, social norms, people from all walks of life would be drawn there. So, we'd have this spiritual experience in common and then outside of that there was tremendous diversity. You know, you'd find yourself rubbing elbows with – Jerry Brown used to come here long ago, lawyers, politicians, house cleaners, carpenters, all kinds of people would come here so that was at the heart of it and it's hard to talk about. Those of us who still go there, we just kind of take it for granted. But it was kind of a heady potency – you know, this is the mid-'70s, the
07:32	'60s and '70s hallucinogenic drug counterculture was very alive in this area and so there was something that drew upon that psychedelic sentiment that was coursing through the culture here and said "Okay, let's get this grounded into the truth of who you are" and not "You're tripping out," but "This is going to be a journey into yourself." And it was a powerful force. Secondarily, it became a social center and they had a restaurant there, the (Inaudible 8:07.8) restaurant. They used to serve lunch and dinner every day you could pay for, so business people would come have meetings, Jerry Brown, like I mentioned. And it was also a social center where

	people would start having families. In the early days there weren't many families. Swami Muktananda was a monk. He had no kids. He wasn't married. There was this sentiment of almost being – there's an Indian word: Sadu (Phonetics), you know, wandering mendicants. People kind of emulated that but in the early '80s married
08:48	couples and then families started to sprout and we really came in – we got married in the early '80s and there was that growing social connectivity of a family life.
	SM: Can you give me an approximation of like how many people were coming there, how many people were living in the neighborhood?
	Seth: Well in 1988 we had documented about 200 households within about a half mile radius of the Ashram of people who are connected to the Ashram. So, that you might say is, you know, five, six hundred, seven hundred people in the immediate Ashram, in the area. Muktananda did not come back here after 1979. He died in 1982 but his successor, Gurumayi, (Phonetics 9:42.5) would come regularly and there would be thousands of people literally wanting to see her when she would come. So, there might be 2000 would come. You could only fit 1000 people in the whole hall so there'd be overflows in the restaurant and the hallways, and the courtyards and peripheral meditation halls, teaching halls. Yeah, so there were literally thousands of people who would come in those days.
10:07	**SM:** How was the Ashram connecting with the other aspects of the community? You were talking about there is the immediate Ashram community but what about other aspects of the neighborhood?

11:28	**Seth:** When the Ashram moved in it was really an outside force. You know, the Stanford Hotel, before it became the Ashram, had a little sign out front that says "Caution Management Not Responsible for Anyone's Health and Safety" inside this place. It was a gritty, tough neighborhood, high crime, high poverty and the Ashram was almost like an outpost where – it was an outpost of safety; it was an outpost of cleanliness; it was sort of like a social order. There was also a lot of churches in the neighborhood and there was a very furtive alliance between the Ashram and all these churches. Furthermore, there was the black Muslim bakery in the UCF Bay Black Muslim movement right down the corner there and, once again, the Ashram was not espousing Islam, nor was it espousing Christianity, nor the others espousing mysticism but there was something of an unspoken connectivity, an alliance there because in the midst of all of that there was all this social degradation, it was the inner city and gosh when we first moved in we would hear gunshots every Friday night and Saturday night all night long and often every night of the week, and sirens constantly. It was you know, bop, bop, bop, bop, bop. You'd hear that or the guns; it was a tough neighborhood. The Ashram didn't come in saying "Oh, hello everyone. We are going to welcome all of you in, the drunks and the derelicts – they were a little more measured about doing that and in fact, the focus of the Ashram was not social outreach. It was meditation and inner study so in a sense it was very inner focused and the gestures of community connectivity you know, go out and clean up the community were perfunctory. However, having

13:05	said that, the whole strip down Stanford that used to be rail lines, you know the Leland Stanford Railway, when the tracks were taken out, the Ashram on its own just planted gardens. They planted roses. They planted trees and the Ashram took care of that. They planted street trees around – the Ashram took care of its own space and made that beautiful, but there wasn't a conscious effort of "Oh, let's go and mix with community leaders and let's mix with civic leaders" other than Gurumayi would come to town and they would invite the mayor and there would be pomp and ceremony. **SM:** Can we talk a little bit about your moving into this house and what that was like for you? **Carolynn:** Absolutely. The first part of the story was that he came home and said "I made an offer on a house" which was like "Really?" Apparently somebody we knew in the Ashram community who was a realtor had this house listed and another couple in the community had put an offer on it which had been rejected. Seth said "Well, I want to put a back-up offer without me seeing the house and he said "Contingent upon my wife's approval," of course. So, we came and looked at it
14:26	together and, in fact, you hadn't even seen the inside of it yet. And it looked a lot different on the outside at that time too, it covered the beautiful Victorian woodwork with stucco; it looked very different. At any rate, we came and looked at it together and when we walked through and it was daylight and I saw that there was a lot of natural light and windows, I agreed that it could be a good place for us

	to raise our kids and be close to our spiritual community. So, we agreed to the terms that were – you know, the woman that was living here – and I can tell you more about some of the funny things that were in the house if that's of interest to you.
	SM: Give me a for instance.
15:35	**Carolynn:** For instance? Well, when we looked at the house this room that we are sort of sitting at the edge of which is sort of a front living room, had an off white carpet that was covered in plastic and then the room behind us, she had turned into a second kitchen because she didn't want her kids to make a mess in her kitchen, so she made a second kitchen back here with black and white tile on the floor meeting up with the carpet that was covered with plastic. Black and white
16:15	cabinets on the far wall, and then there was glitter. Somebody had taken glue and somehow put glitter on the ceiling. Like whatever popular finish that used to be, that sprayed on hideous, in our opinion. Funny things like that. And they hand painted the picture rail with red paint with gold squiggles on it. That was interesting too. So, it was a do it yourself interesting, curious.
	Seth: As a builder, you know, I saw this house that was just junky on the outside and really weird on the inside and I knew that we could turn this into a beautiful place and really restore the Victorian soul of it. I like to say Victorian, though it isn't quite – it is just after the Queen Ann period ended.
	SM: What year was the house built?

	Seth: Probably 1906.
	Carolynn: Wait. The earthquake was in '06. The footprint was pre-earthquake on
17:20	the maps, right?
	Seth: No. It wasn't. Anyway, Sue's going to figure this one out for us. But I knew we could turn this into a marvelous place. That was back before cell phones so I didn't call her up. I think I just came home and "Hi honey. I just bought a house." That was funny. Being a young person, coming into being a builder, I was fascinated with architecture. I was fascinated with the soul of houses too. I wanted to know, what was the history of this house, who lived here, how did they live in this place, what was this neighborhood like, why was this house used the way that it was, and there's something about honoring the trajectory of a house that brings it today, knowing that we are going to fill it with our own purposes and our own joys and our own, you know…
	Carolynn: Aesthetic.
18:30	**Seth:** Yeah. But there was a real interest to restore it to its original Victorian style so we put in the plaster medallion on the ceiling and restored the molding to all the original – you know, I had a bunch of original molding milled and they'd taken out all the old wooden windows and put in these crappy aluminum things so we replaced all of the windows. And we tore out the carpets and I put in maple flooring. It wasn't new. It was recycled from factories. We think it was from a sewing factory because there were all these pins in the grooves. It is all stained

	with motor oil and all. So, there is something about recycling, reclaiming, there is a life in that. It is something that has been used. It has a life to it.
	SM: How did you start getting to know people in the neighborhood, or even on your street?
	Carolynn: The people that we knew in the Ashram, you know, there were a number of them actually on this block and actually a lot of families with kids. When
19:44	we moved in we had two daughters, two and three and there were quite a few families that were starting to be nearby that our kids would play together. But we made a point of it. We made a point of introducing ourselves and getting to know people and I believe that at one point we knew everybody from 55th Street to Marshall Street –
	Seth: Stanford.
	Carolynn: Right, on Marshall Street to Stanford, exactly. And that's changed now because things have turned over and we haven't connected with everybody who is new; in 27 years things have changed.
	Seth: You know, the block here was inhabited partly by new people like us who
20:37	moved in that we knew through the Ashram and it was inhabited partly by people who had been here for decades. Just learning about the soul of the house, I can learn about the soul of the neighborhood just by meeting these people and there was one fella down this street, an old Italian guy. He moved in in 1922; he was a carpenter. He built houses in the area and he was still down the street. I believe his

21:40	wife still didn't speak English. She still just spoke Italian. My gosh, he must have been in his 90s at this point and across the street from him lived a guy, an old guy who was missing some fingers who had worked in Emeryville factories all his life. The two of them didn't talk to each other even though they had been on the same block for 40 years. Right next door to us was a man who had – he grew up in Texas. He never finished 5th grade. He shined shoes and sold newspapers so he'd have enough money to buy himself dinner as a kid because his father didn't provide for him. I would go and ask these people "What's your history? How did you come here?" Our next door neighbor here, he washed dishes at the Claremont Hotel and earned $3.50 an hour and in order to get a loan to buy the house in 1963 he got his boss to say that he earned $4.50 an hour. And he was able to buy that house. What a journey of – a heroic journey to move from Texas with not even a 5th grade education and be able to buy a house where he could raise a family. What a hero of mine. Over here on the corner was an elderly couple. They were the first black family to move into the neighborhood. They bought their house in 1947. It was a consciously red-lined area up to that point. It was Italian, Scandinavians, Portuguese -- they were neither but her skin was fairly light and she assumed that they thought that she was Portuguese even though her husband was dark skinned, she did all the work and they bought the house in 1947. Well, that's another hero's journey. To be the first black family to move into a neighborhood, wow, this was before the civil rights movement was even born. I was fascinated, who are all these

23:06	people who lived here for a long time. **SM:** How long did it take for you to learn some of these stories which, you know, there's a lot of real personal, maybe private, I don't know. Did it come in bits and bits or? **Seth:** I think it really happened quickly because I was intensely interested in finding out about the neighborhood. I would say in the first five years I knew most of all this stuff; I probably did. Though, every now and then I went down to the Emeryville Post Office and gave my ID and the woman said "Oh, I used to live in that house." And so we would have this whole conversation and it was back in the late '60s the owners previous to who we bought the house from and I would say "Oh, oh, okay. Did you put those stairs in? Okay. And what was this like?" The whole things. And one day somebody was actually driving his car slowly by and I saw him "Hi. What's up?" He said "Well, I used to live in that house." So, I find out about the history of – it's like "Oh, are you the -- who's name was painted on the stucco wall in the back?" So, it's about making connections and when you make connections there is like a fabric of life that is – that comes alive and I get to go into one of my favorite little digressions. My father taught me, said that the word *art* has an etymological root that is similar to arthritis which refers to joints, which are
24:52	places of connection. You know, you have arthritis, it's a disease of that point of connection. So, you could think of art as making connections or weaving connections together. And so, in a sense, moving here was a work of art as we

	connected to the house and connected to the neighborhood and the people who are here. **SM:** What are some of the recent changes that you've been experiencing in the neighborhood? What stands out for you? **Carolynn:** There has been a whole lot more building of condominiums, et cetera, nearby, and some smaller businesses and whatnot. The foot traffic on San Pablo has increased, which is a good sign of health in the community, also, along Stanford. The Bay Street complex went in, there was a shift. There was new integrations. There was a park that was rejuvenated and put in with a really nice playground for children and a basketball court and a green area where people tend
26:26	to walk their dogs and that kind of thing so that's been in the last ten or fifteen years. But in the last few years we've seen a huge upsurge of these other buildings going in between here and the freeway. And a lot of professionals are coming here because it's really easy access to San Francisco and actually many points. It's really a great convenient location. **Seth:** Here's a curious thing, okay, we always had dogs. Our last dog died, four years ago, something like that. But from when we first moved in we had Akita's, big, big dogs. Wonderful guard dogs. That was all the alarm that we needed. But we would walk our dog in the neighborhood. There were very few other dogs in the neighborhood for – up until maybe five, six years and my office is downstairs looking out over the sidewalk and there's been this extraordinary uptick. I am going

27:50	to say it probably happened five-six years ago, there's probably two dozen different dog owners who I see walking by. It was just not a part of the neighborhood. Very curious little etiquette not that I could rigorously document anything in any kind of a way. One change is that the older generation that had lived here for decades and decades is now pretty much all gone. It was something. The older generation that transcended, transcended the gritty working class, working poor that pervaded the neighborhood. The older generation held something and they're all gone at this point. **SM:** Are you talking about the Italian/ Scandinavian/ Portuguese? **Seth:** And African American families as well. **SM:** Could you say that again but just specify who you mean?
29:05	**Seth:** When we first moved in there were a lot of older black people along with the few remnants of the Portuguese, Italians, and Scandinavians. There was little remnants of that but there was much more of a population of older African Americans, single men, single women or old couples and they very quietly held a steady place in the neighborhood. They are all but gone. In fact, they are – **Carolynn:** They are. The last one was our next door neighbor who passed and his son is still here but he's our generation. **Seth:** So, that's been a real huge shift. The white population was here for many years up into the early 2000's which predominantly associated with the Ashram. Pixar moved in. I don't remember when Pixar moved in, but when Pixar moved in

	there was a whole new influx of white middle class population. But it wasn't until the last three-four years and I am going to associate this myself with the housing boom in San Francisco or just the tight housing market in San Francisco that there's
30:27	been a tidal wave of young, white professionals that have just flooded the neighborhood (30:27.9). And there's been a sudden, in my perception, a sudden drop-off of the African American population. It is breath-taking. Gentrification has a whole new meaning to me now.
	SM: How do you define gentrification?
	Seth: You know how I define gentrification is the losing of the spirit of a community and there can be multiple communities in an area, but it has to do with social connectivity and a social identity where you see yourself reflected in others around you and if there's a social identity that doesn't have economic means when economic forces bring in a whole new population, your own social identity is just
31:28	washed away because of economic forces and there's a loss of security. There's a loss of identity. There's a loss of comfort. There was a real eye-opening experience that I had three/four/five years ago. I don't remember when at this point. I heard a loud ruckus, barking of dogs and a woman screaming early in the morning, you know, 5:30 in the morning, and I rushed out and ran around the corner and found a white woman with a little dog that had been all mangled and in front of a house on Fremont Street over here where there was an African American family and they were pulling a couple of pit bulls back into their driveway. I helped this woman take

33:13	her mangled dog and put her in the car, and she went off to the pet hospital. The dog ended up surviving but it was a very jarring experience and so I went and talked to her husband later that morning, "How are things" checking in and he wanted to know what happened and I said, "Well, let's go over to the house and talk to them." So, we went over and knocked on the door of this house. People that I had seen on the street but that I really didn't know. And I was expecting them to say 'Oh, we are so sorry about our dogs coming out and that was really a mistake. It won't happen again" and it was quite eye opening to me that these people felt like they were the victims of the situation and they had previously, an hour before, been visited by I don't know, animal control or police, or something like that, some sort of police authority had just visited them and they were really shaken up and we had quite a conversation that I thought was, to me, really constructive. These people, they had grown up in that house. Their parents had lived in that house. They could remember when the kids on Freemont Street would have a football game against the kids on Marshall Street. There was this whole social connectivity and social identity. They were feeling very threatened and fearful as their own neighborhood was being just eroded away. They had these dogs for their own protection because they were fearful, not least among which was fearful of police authorities and they felt like these little dogs had provoked their pit bulls which was their security system and now they're even more vulnerable. And I realized that there's a black community and a white community that coexist without touching

34:37	except when there are, you know, unfortunate conflicts when they crash into one another. Otherwise, they just don't touch and I was completely blind to this whole social world that had such meaning and life and was being destroyed. And was I a part of what destroyed that or not, I don't know, but I represent it and that's enough. It was a revelation for me to understand, this is what gentrification is about. It's about one's own sense of security and place in the world and having a place that you call home. I have become uncomfortable seeing this last tidal wave of whiteness moving into the neighborhood because I can feel that loss of what was here.
	SM: So, in terms of thinking about remediation, or remedy, or how to support, what do you think a neighborhood can do, or was has – I am thinking about SPAGGIA and I know you were involved with it. What has SPAGGIA (San Pablo Avenue Golden Gate Improvement Association) done in terms of helping build community or what could they do?
35:58	**Seth:** I think one of the most important things to do is communication and by that it is not talking, it's listening. It's asking, it's having the courage to go to people that you are not connected to, people who are on the other side of the fence, people who are around the corner who are not part of your life and the courage in talking to them and saying "I want to know about your life and what you are afraid of, or what you aspire for, or what's alive for you. Tell me about your memories of those football games" and listen so, that their story can become alive in me. Can SPAGGIA

	do that? I don't know. But that strikes me as the first link in these coexistent, non-touching neighborhoods where there's listening.
	SM: Well, that also brings up the question, and we talked a little bit about it the last time we spoke about, you know, history, deep history, more recent history,
37:12	where should all of this go? Who should have access to it? How should it be collected? What kind of thoughts do you have about that because you two have been here for a long time and you've seen a lot of changes and you contain a lot of history too?
	Seth: You know, something that strikes me as curious, the way knowledge is held is changing rapidly right now. We are moving to a digital society. All of these Carnegie libraries that spread across the country what, 100 years ago, we have a Carnegie library right here. How many people go to the library to get information now? In 20 years that has radically changed. What is that library then? That is collective social space and part of what that collective social space needs to have is a reflection of
38:25	who we are and where we have come from. It may not be a place just for books, but it's a place where people can have conversation and dialogue where, okay, we have these e-groups, what's the neighborhood next door? I can't keep up with all of this stuff.
	Carolynn: Our Golden Gate Library has had jazz programs in the summer, regular jazz programs in the summer and that kind of thing and performances, dance performances at the center so it's been a community gathering.

39:38	**Seth:** You know, there's a lot of virtual space that is shared but there's something about bodies meeting bodies, bodies collectively having political conversations, having civic conversations, having cultural conversations, performances and ritual, the old New England town square where there's a monument and a bandstand and people intercept. This neighborhood doesn't have a place of intersection. We have a congested traffic section, but there's not a social intersection so, here's just a thought, that that library can be transformed from somewhat of an antiquated repository of knowledge to being a physical locus, not unlike the old map (39:38.8) of the downtown Oakland library; this could have its own map room with oral histories with photographic histories, with the kind of documenting that you're doing. It exists in physical space. There is a soul of this neighborhood. That's a place where it can be –
41:07	**Carolynn:** Explored, yeah, with conversation. You know, we had that Love Your Neighborhood Day last summer. It was marvelous, you know. The merchants and the artists, and the neighbors, everybody was out and saying hello to each other and seeing what was going on, you know? We visited some businesses. We have been here all these years but there are many places that we've never set foot in just because it's not what we've made a habit of necessarily. I love that. I think more of that would be wonderfully enlivening and bring people together again and again. We used to have block parties too sometimes and I guess every now and again something like that pops up when somebody has the will and the

42:24	organization to do it. But I really do like the idea of the library being more of a community meeting space. It's been our voting – our polling place for decades primarily until it was under renovation and now we've – but I imagine we'll be back there when things settle down. Something that goes back to another question that you had about the neighborhood changing and I wanted to mention it, is that in the late '80s and in the '90s there were many children right in this one block, as our kids were growing up I think there were – at one point there were 17 kids that lived in this one block and now there's two that we've seen. The family that has these two children moved in and bought the house from an elderly black family when she passed away and they had one baby and then they had a second one and now those kids are – that's who we see and they're the only ones. Our kids are grown and the other kids grew up. So, that's one of the waves of change that we've seen immediately in just our own little personal world here. **SM:** And your new neighbors, what kind of stories do you share with them? Like with this family, what kinds of things, how do you approach your world now as kind of being the stewards or care-takers of what's been before? **Carolynn:** Well, people are pretty busy, if people are interested we are happy to talk to them about it but the kids, those two kids I mentioned, they like to come down and talk to us and we have given them some – you know, when our son outgrew stuff, you know, he's in college now, we would pass things down to them and so – but they'll come along and just see what we're up to and Isabelle has

	offered to help with some various little things.
43:36	**Seth:** We have less connectivity with our immediate neighbors now than we did 20 years ago and part of that is because there is much less of a concentration of Ashram connected families. We don't have kids and few other people have kids so that's a form of connection that we don't share. A lot of the people who have moved in, live their busy lives and so we have less connectivity. There's a wonderful couple down the street, Kent and –
	Carolynn: Aren't we supposed to keep things a little anonymous here. Sorry.
	Seth: He's an electrician. She's an artists of sorts. I don't know anything about it. A vulture sculpture out in the front of their house, you know, they go to Burning Man and we talk to them about their garden and so forth.
	Carolynn: And they keep bees – or they did.
	Seth: So, there's a sense of connection but we might see them once every month or two months and it is just sort of, a "Hi neighbor" kind of a thing. I don't know so much where did they come from, what makes them click other than whacky
44:45	sculptures and –
	Carolynn: They have a marvelous – they have a pickup truck that I think they take to Burning Man, but I know they put it in the Berkeley parade. What's that parade? How Berkeley Can You Be? It's outfitted like a covered wagon with a mule that – a wooden mule and has legs that move and all.
	Seth: The point is is that we know them a little bit and we know them better than

	half the people on the block. So, I feel less connectivity now than I did 20 years ago.
	SM: And you keep mentioning the busyness, so what is it that is so different now than 20 years ago? Is it how people are conducting their lives?
	Carolynn: I wonder. I feel like things are – everything feels speeded up. It feels much faster and theirs is just that sense of everything is moving along quite quickly and I don't think people spend the same amount of time you know, it's just a sense. It is a kinesthetic sense that this urban area and many others probably, are moving
46:15	really fast and maybe we need to slow down a little more to stop and say hello and actually have a conversation like we used to.
	Seth: I think it is because I have cementetria (46:15.5). I am getting old and fixed in my ways.
	SM: And you mention that there aren't as many people from the Ashram community around here. When did that start to shift?
	Seth: Twelve years ago. There was a shift in how teachings were being given at the Ashram and there was a stepping back from it being a big social scene and a much greater emphasis on simply the individual inner study and so it is becoming more a contemplative place. It has become a quieter place. The café there has really cut back. The programs there have also really cut back because it's not so much about lots of people coming together lots of times, but people doing the inner work with whatever their walk of life is and so it is coincided then with people filtering away from this place. It still has a lot of potency but it's not loud.

	Carolynn: It's not as hectic and bustling. I think that people who were there for the buzz and the glamour, when that faded then the people that are left that are still – that still want to partake are the people who want to study and want to take the courses and, you know, meditate and chant together and individually.
48:21	**SM:** How does the Ashram see its role in these different cycles of change of the outer part of the neighborhood?
	Seth: You know, I can't speak for the Ashram in a sense, but it is very inward focused and so in a sense it is a little bit divorced, or disconnected from what's going on around it. I think I will leave it at that.
	SM: I think we've covered all the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you feel like you want to add?
	Seth: We're nature lovers. You know, I studied ornithology in college. We have some land in Big Sur; we go and swim under waterfalls and soak in hot springs, and revel at sunsets and birds, and we often – you know, when we were young imagined, oh we're going to live in the mountains of New Mexico, or oh, we're going to go live in rural Oregon, we're going to live out at some home set at the end of some dirt road somewhere, and here we are in the inner city, you know, the most congested freeway in the western United States is a few blocks away and the port of Oakland and the grit from all the engines has just pelt our house and our
50:27	lungs, and we would sometimes wonder what the hell are we doing living here. I feel a sense of community here and a sense of belonging here. I love being here

	and we've made something of a paradise for ourselves with nature in our backyard just with all the plants that we've planted and the birds that we bring, and the beauty that we celebrate.
	Carolynn: And we've deliberately put in mostly California natives which draw the native wildlife. Hummingbirds, and butterflies, and all sorts of songbirds, and that kind of thing, and with more birds we also have Cooper hawks that were nesting for years in some very tall trees that were nearby and we could see them coming and going from their nest. Those trees are gone so the hawks aren't nesting here anymore. The trees got taken out a couple years ago. But we actually have seen some hawks this winter coming through, so who knows, maybe they found another spot, the Cooper's hawk's because they prey on the birds. So, this is – we've brought, I feel that because of our intention and because we feed the birds that we have brought a vitality of that to our little corner here and it enlivens us a lot; it
52:00	nurtures us to feel like, yes, we can be in the city and still have that bit of natural beauty and energy.
	SM: That makes me think of... You know, I just parked a little ways down the street and there is this lot with a chain link fence, green and I say one small chair and I was so curious, what is this space?
	Carolynn: That is actually owned by the Ashram. It is called Shambo Meadows and it used to – I don't know if it was before the Ashram owned it, anyway, now they have created this beautiful little green space and because they have this urban,

53:05	concentrated urban – this is their outdoor space that they use and when they have family retreats, you know, once a year there is always family retreats. People come from all over the world and do practices together and have programs together and they will play. The kids will play there. They'll have meals out there and plays; it's a wonderful place for an outdoor space for those activities that are connected to our community. **SM:** So, when those activities aren't happening? **Carolynn:** Then it is just being taken care of by the – you know, the lawn is being taken care of, the trees and the plants are being taken care of. **Seth:** You know, if you look at the sidewalk patterns, it is clear that there used to be a house on the Marshal Street side. There is something that led to steps. How long ago that house went away, I don't know, but after prohibition, if you look at the Sanborn map there is a big brick building on the San Pablo side that said Beer Depot. Okay, what a beer depot is, I don't know. Did they brew it or did they just – a distributor. But when we moved in it was a junk yard, an automobile junk yard and tow trucks would go in and out and it was a filthy mess. Anyway, we were very happy once the junk yard was taken out and the Ashram had the whole area
54:23	graded and planted and all. So, it has lived through a few incarnations already. **SM:** It is just a really surprising spot. **Carolynn:** And there are birds that really like that, you know, environment. The grass and what it brings, the earthworms, and the little flying insects that come up

	from the grass, and that kind of thing. There's black phoebes which are insect eaters, so you see them swooping over the grass and catching bugs. We love it.
	Seth: I'd like to know if our esteemed camera man has any questions for us.
	SM: Yeah, Matt usually has something to say. He usually has good ones.
	Matt Dibble: Gosh, I don't right now because – it must be because you asked. But thank you for including me. I think you covered a lot.
	Seth: Have you filmed a few of these together?
	SM: Yeah. This is, I think, our eighth.
	Seth: Really? Then I am dying to hear a question from you.
	SM: And Matt and I have known each other a long time. Our kids have grown up together.
55:50	**Seth:** There's something tickling my mind and I might want to say, but I am ... I like knowing that we're not just passing through. We're going to grow old in this house. We may well end up having lived here 50 years. It should be a big portion of this house's history and we renewed this house, really restored it to an earlier dignity that it had. I know that we have contributed to the vitality of this community just by sitting here and talking with you, we're collaborators with you and especially in this day and age where there is so much mobility and being untethered, there is something about contributing to a community that is something worthwhile doing in one's life.
	Carolynn: Absolutely.

	Seth: Which is, in a way – thank you.
	Carolynn: Yes. Thank you.
	SM: You're welcome. Thank you.
57:06	**Matt Dibble (videographer):** I've got a question. Where are you both from and what kind of communities did you grow up in?
	Carolynn: Well, I was born in California but I was born in Los Angeles. My father was transferred to Alaska to do some service in the Air Force for a couple of years and then we ended up landing in Sacramento, California when I was in preschool and then we moved to Colorado when I was in high school. So, then I came back to California when I was in my 20s. In Colorado I actually had the privilege of living outside of Denver in a mountain area and going to a small mountain community high school and that was, you know, we had a place with five acres and I finally realized the lifelong dream of actually being able to have a horse. That was sort of – you know they were yanking me away from all my friends and everything I knew in Sacramento and it was like, okay, we're in Colorado, you get to have a horse. So, I got to be a mountain girl for a while and I attended college at the University of
58:26	Colorado in Denver and was drawn back to the West Coast in my 20s.
	SM: What brought you here?
	Carolynn: Well, I think I needed a change of scene and being landlocked, well, actually I spend summers with my grandparents often in Delaware on the seashore so I was missing that a lot, not being able to see the ocean or be part of that kind of

	environment too. So, I came back. And I think it was destiny. I don't know. I was supposed to meet this guy and be here. That's – does that answer your question? Yeah. Okay.
59:54	**Seth:** I will start with my parents. My mother was raised Mennonite and her parents were missionaries so she grew up in India and up until she was 17, my mother lived in India and went to school in Darjeeling up in the foothills of the Himalayas and then she went back to a Mennonite college in Indiana and ended up going to Japan to do missionary work after World War II. My dad grew up in the Midwest and he went to Princeton and by the time he was done he hadn't the faintest idea of what he wanted to do with his life and he found a program teaching English in Japan for three years and he said, "Great! Three more years before I have to decide what I have to do. That's great." So, my parents met in Japan post-war, and were married there and my brother was born there and I was born there and then we left when I was just an infant and so then my father hadn't really decided what he wanted to do when he grew up and ended up taking classes in art and got an MFA at The University of Chicago, and then met the sculptor, Pete Voulkos and his life was revolutionized. They moved to Berkeley and my dad went to graduate school at Cal, studied with Pete Voulkos, became a professor in the art department at Cal. So, I grew up in Berkeley, mostly Berkeley and Oakland in the art world in the '60s. I would go down mostly in the summer times, go down to Sproul Plaza on Friday's at noon because they would be handing out Wes Wilson Fillmore posters

1:01:28	for free and, you know, we were part of the scene. I went to Altamont with my mom to see the Rolling Stones. My parents were well-connected. They knew many famous people and famous artists. It was a very wild world. In fact, my parents had kind of a wilder life than my brother and sister, and I did. We were all a little more conservative than they were. I went to UC Santa Cruz. My love is nature and natural history. Coming out of that, I took my love of nature and decided to work with it and create, make beauty out of the sacrifice that nature makes for us; so, I became a builder and I have been here ever since. **(Audio Ends)**

"YOU NEED TO LOOK AROUND AND SEE WHAT COMMUNITY IS BEFORE YOU TRY TO BUILD IT."

–Laurie Stoerkel

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SEE WHAT COMMUNITY IS BEFORE
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PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Laurie Stoerkel, 2015

Photo by Matt Dibble

	marksearch_Laurie Stoerkel 10/29/14 Video Transcript
00:03	**Laurie:** My name is Laurie Stoerkel. It's difficult to spell. I am going to be 52 in a month and I've lived here for 11 years. I bought my house 11 years ago, first house I've ever bought. **Sue Mark:** And why did you decide here in this neighborhood? **Laurie:** Well, the first thing I did was I gathered a map of Oakland and a highlighter and I highlighted the areas that I could afford. Then I looked at the areas that were best for public transportation and walking because I really don't like driving my car. Then I think, yeah, crime and all that stuff, I didn't look at stats. It is just that somebody would say that, "Yeah, this area isn't so good" and I think people actually said "I don't know about crime in that area," but it wasn't like a scary thing to me because I have done a lot of traveling in the world and it just kind of had a reputation. Then I did look at the stats, which were on the computer at that point. They did triangles for, you know, someone getting beat up or gunfire, and a lot of the people getting beat up or whatever, it was just domestic. Which is very sad, but it is the truth. It wasn't like I was going to get mugged walking down the street or anything. My realtor at the time, you know, looked at what my needs were as far as a house, which was how many rooms and such and we walked in and her first reaction was like, "This is not such a good house, Laurie." My reaction was "Oh my God. I can afford something this nice." So, we walked around and as we did, you know we looked at the house and then we came out to the back yard and I was like, "Holy Toledo," 'cause I was really into gardening that day and from the outside it didn't show well because they were doing construction on this street.
01:41	

02:09	They were doing something with the sewer pipe, the main line and there was a porta potty across the street and there was a big SUV thing parked in the driveway and it didn't have what they call curb appeal. So, we walked in and the reason my realtor had brought me here was because it had the right number of rooms and such. So, we walked in and we kind of looked around and my realtor was like, "I don't know, Laurie." Like, it was kind of below her standards and I was, "Oh my God! I can afford something this nice." So, we walked around and looked and you could see that it had good bones, as the realtor said. We walked out in the back yard and there is like acreage back here and we're in the middle of the city. There were the apple trees and there was the swing set because they had kids. I remember my realtor going "Oh my God," and she was just impressed with the size of the lot. It is 84 square feet length. I am bad with numbers like that. I was really into gardening at the time and it was just like mowed straight. There wasn't any like bushes or anything. But it had these very mature trees and so it was the Garden of Eden I thought. I was like, "Yep. I love this house." It was the first house I looked at. It was. She took me in the neighborhood and we saw a few more but this one really was my favorite. **SM:** And what did you do to get to know the neighborhood before you made your final decision? **Laurie:** My Realtor felt it was a bad fit. I get another realtor down the line. She couldn't give me comps. So, I was new to this whole business of buying a house but I got on my bicycle one day before work, so it was probably like 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. and I show up on my bike, yellow biking jacket, helmet, little white woman and her bike and there wasn't really a lot of people who would fit that description 11 years ago. I parked my bike and I started taking
03:58	pictures and I drove a few more houses down and took some more pictures. And as I was

	taking a picture, I look and there was a man there and he said "Hey, take my picture." And he was very friendly so I went over because I am friendly and we started chatting and he was born and raised in that house and he was quite a character. So, I am talking to him and another woman looks out and she is up in the Victorian up there and she is looks down and says "Hey." She was kind of neighborhood watch. She rented and we lost her. Her name was Eliza and she wants to know what Phil is telling me and who I am and what's going on. So, then I talked to her. I talked to both of them and kind of explained who I was and why I was buying the house. They were very friendly and very welcoming although Eliza wanted to warn me a little bit about the crime. She was fabulous. She really – there was a lot of drug dealing in those days straight out and she lived right next to one of the apartment buildings where a lot of that was going on. It was my first intro and I was just like, "These are people I want to live next to." It was pretty fabulous.
05:21	**SM:** How did you get to know your neighbors after you moved in? **Laurie:** I remember one of the first neighbors I met was Rodrick and he, again, had been born and raised and I must have been out in the front yard either doing some kind of maintenance because I remember I was in my driveway and he was like "Oh! Hi. I am friendly." I was like "Nice to meet you. I am Laurie." Yeah, he goes "Welcome!" And he was really like "Glad to have you here." And he was just so fabulous and he was this tall, thin, black guy and he has passed away since. I went to his funeral. He had a hard life. He wasn't all that old, but you know, he had had a hard life but he was so lovely, just a lovely person. **SM:** And how did you get to know other neighbors? **Laurie:** My neighbor's right next door had purchased their home just about at the same time and we share property line so we were working on blackberry removal and ivy removal along
06:17	

	the fence line. So, I met them in that manner. I guess I was just in the front yard doing, just doing, 'cause I love gardening and I don't quite remember exactly how but basically it was being in the front yard and I had a dog and I was one of the few people who would walk a dog on a leash and I don't have children so I would talk and hang out with the little kids and I would have a yard full of kids and they liked to climb my tree. When I first moved in my friends would say, "Don't let them climb your tree because if they fall and get hurt you'll get sued." I just was like, "That's not the world I want to live in and what are the chances of them falling out of a tree and getting hurt? To this day I have rules, one of the rules is if you're going to climb the tree, you cannot – you have to be big enough so that you can't climb on a chair to get into the tree and there can be nothing under the tree, no bikes, table, nothing. Because I always tell them if you fall out of the tree and hit a bike, you'll get hurt. If
07:38	you fall out of the tree and hit the ground you'll bounce. They totally get it and at one time I think I had five kids in that tree. But they have to be little ones because it's not that big of a tree and it's got so many branches.
	SM: Which tree did they climb up?
	Laurie: It's a Bay Laurel. There were once two but the one on the one side died and I think it was from too much water because this area has so much ground water and it's very high.
	SM: What do you know about the history of your house and the neighboring houses here?
	Laurie: So much. My house was supposedly built in 1925. The people who come in who know architecture are like "It doesn't look like that." My house itself is like the Winchester Mansion. It has been added on so many times. People who owned it before me were Nigerian and they lived here for 11 years. I was talking to my other neighbors and they
08:37	referred to them as the Africans because when the Africans were owning the house they

10:06	didn't care about the grapes and so the other neighbors would collect the grapes and make wine. So, before that I think there was a couple and I don't know if they had kids. I am getting the sense they didn't and the reason I know is one day I get a knock on the door and I open the door and there is a man standing there. He is kind of leaning against, you know, kind of sitting on the porch thing and he is like "Hi." And he introduced himself and he said "My auntie used to live here. Would it be okay if I came in and looked around?" You know, he is like a black man, maybe in his early 40s at the time. "Sure. Come on in." So, he walks through and he said "Oh, it really looks different in here but yeah..." Then he started telling me how much he loved his auntie and how he used to mow her lawn and how she had really, not really helped raised him but he had spent a lot of time here. Then he came in the back yard and he was like "Oh! There is the old barbeque that we used to use." And he just had so many loving memories and I asked him about the shack in the back and he had some answers to that question. **SM:** So what did he tell you about that building? **Laurie:** Stuff. Nothing bad. So he came out in the back yard and he looked around and he said, "Yeah, I used to mow this lawn." He was so happy to be here. Then he gave me, he was like "Oh, I am going to give you this book." It was a self-published book of poetry and I have it in the house and it is just kind of like the magic. Then, also in '75 whoever was living here, the father had been in a car accident so then they added the back section which has a concrete slab and is wheelchair accessible. There is still a ramp in my garage and the bathroom is kind of funky 'cause they have a ramp going up to the shower cause I guess that's how they did that. Historically, I know it's been an Italian neighborhood and then

10:58	when you look at the trees and the grape vines, it just reminds me of what Italian people would plant. Where I come from we have – where I come from the different ethnicities are different flavors of white and European. So, we have the Italians and then we would have the Polish, and other than that we are so many generations past having people come from Europe that there wasn't really a strong – we would tease the Italians. They were fun to make fun of and they didn't care and they kind of thought it was fun. **SM:** Tell me a little more about the grape vines. **Laurie:** So, the grape vines, the stalk of the grape vine is like this and so it has been there for a long time and it grows along the fence, along the property line. The neighbors that have been here a while talk about how much wine they used to make out of it; they all made wine. The thing that I really found out very quickly was that the kids in the neighborhood picked the fruit and what used to be common – how can I say this. So, the grape vine is obviously old because it has got that big stalk and then it would grow along the property line and then the kids would just invite themselves in to pick the grapes and, in fact, one day my neighbor who lives next door happened to be in my house and the window was open, and these kids, maybe like 12, 11 were picking the grapes and she didn't have a dividing fence at that point so you could still walk what she kind of considered her backyard, and she said to
12:33	them "Hey, don't pick those grapes." And she was in my window and I was like "Oh, that is so not the message I want to give out." And this is what the kid said "They're our grapes." The kids were entitled. Those were their grapes. Also, because there wasn't that fence that they put up since, they would go in the back yard and there is a huge old plum tree. It's just huge. The trunk is huge and they would climb in that tree and pick those plums. And it was their tree. Before my current neighbors bought -- they were just used to coming back and picking
13:12	

	plums when they were in season and one day I look out and again, the tree has about four kids climbing in it and they're just picking plums. You know, when I was a kid we had some kind of wild area where we'd go pick blackberries and I think it is just kind of a natural thing for hunters and gatherers and kids just love it. They absolutely love it. So, they were picking the grapes on my side, well, on our side and then the neighbor put up a fence. It was a small one but more of a gate to kind of demarcate the area that is now her backyard. And before the two houses, because there is two houses on that property, they had both been occupied by people who had lived here, were born and raised here, had grandchildren living on the block and they all knew each other. I kind of likened that to the commons that in Europe it is like a lot of space and it really didn't belong to any one person and you have picket fences to
14:26	keep the cows out of your specific yard area. It wasn't to keep the people out because the main area, everybody kind of shared it. There are a lot of historically a lot of understandings. When the demographics started changing and new people started coming into the neighborhood that didn't have social connections like long-term family extended family connections, they stated putting up fences because they wanted to keep their children safe and they didn't want their children running in the street and getting hit by a car. I would love to see on this street or anywhere kind of nearby any child that's ever been hit or killed by a car. The cars drive really fast on this street sometimes and there's this ethic of when you're allowed in the street and everybody is on it all the time. Like, if you're a little kid, you have to look both ways and if you don't everyone is on you. The other kids, any neighbor that happens to see you do that, it is just like – I really gave it some thought the other day and
15:28	there is no like, you must be four years old to cross the street, or you must be this high to cross the street. But they're crossing the street really young and they play in the street and it

16:15	is just they all know that you look both ways and you don't ride your bike on the street until you're a certain age and again, it's not defined. It is just I think when people stop yelling at you that you get to ride your bike on the street. One of the things, one of my pet peeves is when people park their car in the driveway but it is blocking the sidewalk. I am just that kind of neighbor that I try politely to point out to them that we have kids who use the sidewalk. I always use this one "Mothers with baby carriages" and we actually had a neighbor and I am not sure if it was – I am not sure what it was but he walked very – he had a cane and he walked kind of odd and he needed to use the sidewalk and if your car is there, you have to go around. So, again, that's the question of the commons. I think people not knowing. The other part that is very different I think for a lot of people is that there is this constant kind of, I call it hippy leftist idea about take the street, that's the people, away from cars, and it kind of happens in my neighborhood because someone will be driving down the street and they'll see their buddy and they'll stop and hopefully they will pull over a little bit; it could be right in the middle of the street and now there's two people talking to each other and you come up in a car and you have to go around them because they're blocking you. That is part of the culture. It is just this – and it's not like this studied, take this street back for the people, it just happens. I do it. It's because you have to. Because you're driving down the street and you have to say something to your neighbor and the thing you have to say may just be "How you doin'?" Just because that's the way I grew up. You're living next door to these people and it just makes life better and it is normal.
17:54	You shouldn't drive up in your car, click your garage door opener and go in the house and not know your neighbors. Because I am very helpful, one day I saw a guy kind of looking around because the way we're set up, you can never find an address because there are so

18:22	many houses behind houses. And I said "Excuse me, can I help you?" I really wanted to help him. He goes "No. I know you're trying to be a good neighbor." And I was like, that is such a euphemism and it is like I hear it all the time from people, you know, "Well, I want to be a good neighbor." Those are people that are new because that is being a good neighbor to them is like they want to try to stop crime by being a good neighbor. And they reach out to other people to be a good neighbor. **SM:** How do you see it differently? **Laurie:** For me, it's like I don't even say the word how to be a good neighbor. But if you were to ask me the definition of, it would be accepting your neighbors and understanding – just accepting them and I hate to use the word tolerating, but it can't be your way. You have to kind of put up with things and you have a deal breaker. Like, when it reaches a point, and hopefully you have the kind of relationship with them where you can talk to them. Not always because you get weirdos on the block or people that just for cultural or background reasons or personality reasons, you really can't talk to them in person. Another thought I had is that often times you go these neighborhood watch meetings and people need – you move into a neighborhood and the neighborhood has a reputation for crime so you go to the neighborhood watch meetings and you decide that in order to make the neighborhood safe you need to get to know your neighbor so you can be a good neighbor and the reason you meet your neighbors is to fight crime. It is so not – to me it is not the reason I met my
20:02	neighbors. You know? To me it is just not the way I believe – the reason I met my neighbors is that it is just more fun. It makes life better. I get to say hello to someone in the morning, and how's the weather? You know? Then once you have a relationship, you know "What was going on with that noise last night?" You get to share information and we had the water

21:35	company come through, East Bay Mud and give us all laterals and we talked to each other about it and I actually, I believe, convinced a couple people to get laterals because you've got this official thing from the government offering you a free lunch, well there's no such thing as a free lunch but I read it carefully and I knew what it meant and they had just thrown it away because it's from the government and more junk mail. So, we talked about what was going on and why all these people are having their driveways dug up and so that is one of the reasons, some of the benefits of knowing your neighbors. But for me it is not the reason. It is just that these are your neighbors and they're not really extended family, but it is just natural. It is unnatural to not know your neighbors. That's the weird part. And it's the way I grew up. I grew up in a neighborhood where everybody was – pretty much the way that it was built, we were all the same age and we all had kids, I should say, I was one of them. To me, it's just normal. There is no other way to live. I would not be happy in a neighborhood where I couldn't have a relationship with my neighbors. It is just what I am used to.
23:02	**SM:** What about some of the changes do you want to talk about? Any recent changes in your neighborhood? **Laurie:** So, about three years ago, I think is when it started. It was like the trickle of people – when I moved in it was predominantly an African American neighborhood and then I started noticing white people and when I very first got my dog, it was Kim and I were the only ones you'd ever see walking their dog on a leash. So, one of the first things I told my neighbor when I got my dog, because she saw me and she was sitting on the porch and she sees my dog and I look at her and I go, "I promise, I will never let my dog pee or poop in your yard." Her yard looks like a golf course. She takes great pride in her yard. Even if you pick up the poop, the urine turns your grass yellow. And she looked at me and she goes "Thank you,

	Laurie." Then we started getting people who, of course, you've moved to the suburbs, or I am sorry, people who had been living in the city and always wanted a dog, and now you have a house with a yard and you get a dog and you're walking your dog and your dog is peeing and pooping. You pick up the poop but, you know, it's just pee so when they first started peeing in their yard, I tried. How do you politely tell somebody what to do with their dog?
	SM: So, are you talking about some of the new neighbors?
	Laurie: The new neighbors, definitely. The new neighbors, now we have, I call it a dog population explosion in this neighborhood, and it is perfectly fine to let your dog pee in someone's yard because it is not poop, right, but not in her yard. Come pee in my yard. Pee
24:35	in the yard two houses up but don't pee in her yard. It was really hard to say that without them feeling defensive. It was difficult. It is just a wave of dogs here, ya know. There is so many good things to be said about walking a dog. That's how people meet each other because the dog is the ice breaker.
	SM: So, tell me about when you started noticing more significant changes in the neighborhood.
	Laurie: I am an expert on my block. I sit at my dining room table and I look out the window because that's where I am working and I watch everything. You don't need TV when you have neighbors. I am going to say three, maybe four years ago I started noticing people walking down the block were not all black. Like there were some white people walking down
25:22	the street and they stuck out probably like I did when I first moved here and neighborhoods change but it was the rate of change. It happened like that. The term people are using is gentrification. I call it the G-word because if you say gentrification, I'll bet whoever just heard me say that, the hair on the back of their neck went up. It is so totally loaded.

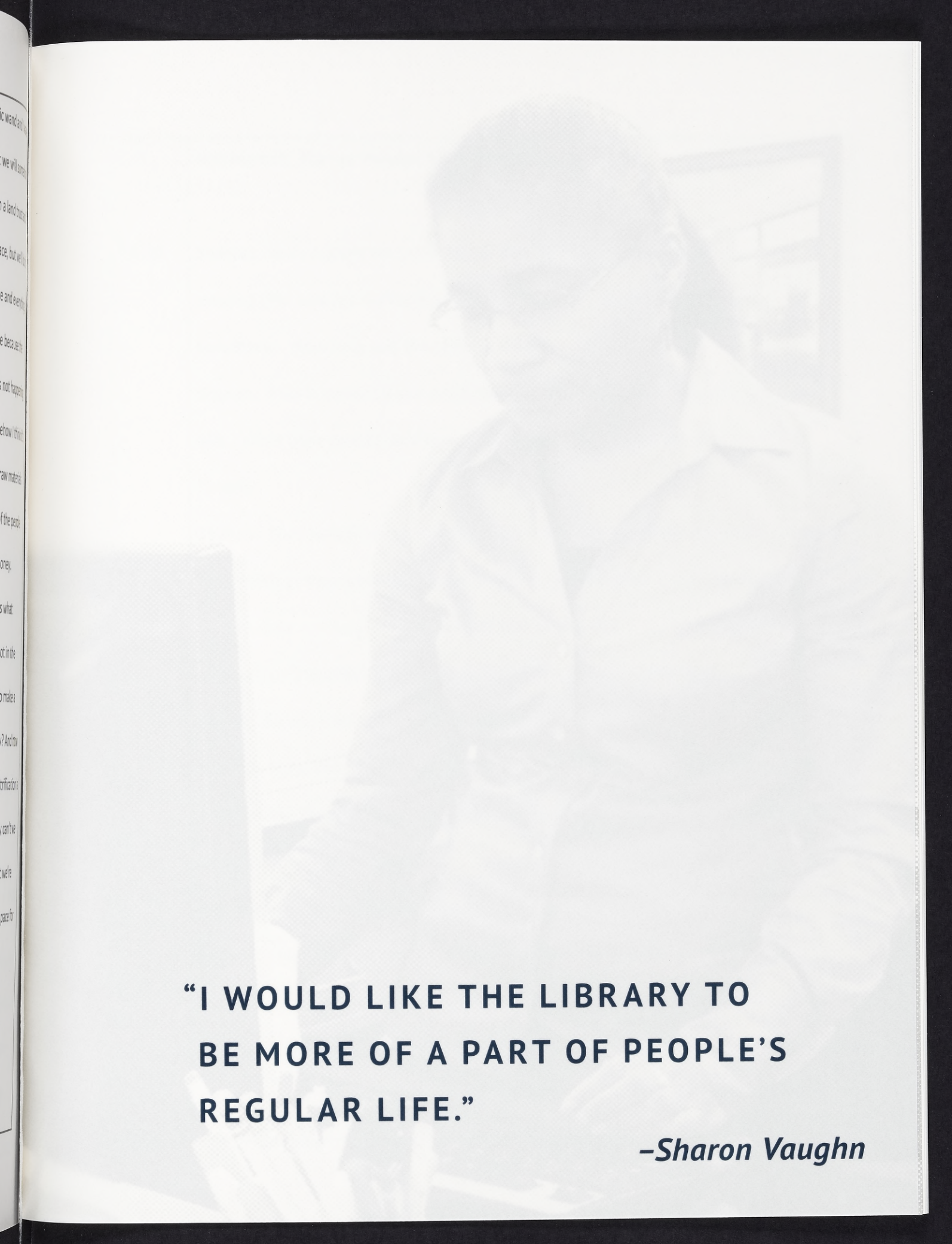
	My observation is that when you say the word gentrification people are immediately put into two groups. They do it themselves, or when they are talking about a third party, you are either in the gentrification world, you are either a perpetrator or a victim and there doesn't seem to be any middle ground and it's not the fault of the individuals. It's to me a manifestation of the entire system that we have in this country, capitalism, the banks running the scene, the best congress that money can buy, yet individuals have a lot of power to make personal choices. This is the challenge, is how do you get your needs met and how do you give things up for the greater community. And that's the challenge that we have in
26:52	this country I think, because we're so independent and we want basically, it is kind of like the tyranny of the individual.
	SM: What do you see more specifically here on your block as indicators of say, perpetrator cam or victim cam or just middleness?
	Laurie: There is no middleness. There is no middleness. Depending on who looks at me, I am a perpetrator. I was an early gentrifier, or I am being victimized because I am losing the neighbors that I love. Of course there is middle ground. There always is because it's not, excuse the expression, black and white. It isn't wrong or right. It just kind of is and different individuals may be doing it in a nicer way and some people are straight up pissing me off. You know? I think it was the rate of change.
28:08	**SM:** What do you think is a good way, in light of all these changes, rapid movement, what's a good way to preserve a good sense of place through stories, through history? Where can that happen? How can that happen?
	Laurie: Right. Gosh. You have to ask me that one again, please, because it's such a big question. It's not just about individuals on our street. It is the big picture of how we as an

29:21	American culture and a western culture treat each other. There isn't a simple answer like "Let's have pot-lucks." It's not culturally appropriate for everyone. I guess the simple answer is when someone moves into our neighborhood, they need a fruit basket and in that fruit basket is a reading list of how you can now move into a different neighborhood and understand the different culture because it's hard when two cultures come together. When in Rome do as the Romans. It's a big question. If I had to tick off what you need to do, you need to first chill out and don't try to make changes. You need to look around and see what community is here before you try to build community. You need to understand that although you really like your culture, there is a culture already here and you need to learn about it. Not immediately. And you need to reach out and learn in a different way and it is, again, nobody's fault because we are coming from different cultures. But I believe the onus is on the new people coming in. As this one lovely woman put in one of her articles, "Imagine, if you moved into somebody's house and started rearranging their furniture." You know, so there isn't one thing that can be done other than being aware that when you move into a new place you need to really pause and look before you start making your changes. It's really hard. Because I think it's really hard when somebody moves into a new place, especially the situation we have here because it's so fabulous and you're so excited, and you want to grab it and get moving, and you want it to be what you want it to be, and you don't have the patience or the wherewithal, or the teaching that you need
30:59	because of the greater culture that we live in to accept things that are different than you. You have to – so that's the quick answer is outreach to new people, like we need the old fashioned welcome wagon with the understanding that we have a new culture coming in. We can call it a demographic because nobody wants to kind of own up to how different our

	cultures are. In England you are not afraid to mention what class you're in. You immediately identify it by accent, right. But in the United States because of words like racism and white supremacy, and we have a history and our cultures are different and our cultures are the same because we're American. But more and more in the news now we are actually learning that it is a different experience for difference races and different cultures. So, I guess the quick answer is if I were to do it, if I were queen I would say "Hey, here's your fruit basket." And the reason I chose fruit basket is because Chris Rock actually said "White people love fruit baskets" and so for us it's culturally appropriate to give out fruit baskets. And I feel it is my responsibility because the culture of people coming in are people I am more familiar with because I am part of that culture. I am different because I feel I come from a working class
32:56	background, and I think there is so much opportunity here to do just what you said. How do you – what was the direct question before? I get all crazy and happy about the possibilities. **SM:** What question did ask? How do you generate a sense of place through sharing stories and history? How do you preserve and also create this sense of -- **Laurie:** So, the question is how do you generate a sense of place. You don't generate it. It's here. We have a sense of place. The people that are now coming here, they need to learn our sense of place. They need to come join us. So, it is not generating a sense of place, it's joining in on a sense of place that's here and learning about our sense of place. The reason why I think there's this idea of generating a sense of place is the people that are coming here have either lost the place they came from or have never really had the experience of place. But that is here. We have place. We have fruit trees that have been here forever; we have
34:07	families that have been here for generations; we have multigenerational families on this

35:56	block; we have apartment complexes that are here and the renters have rented longer than a lot of the home owners. But because they don't own the property, they kind of aren't respected as much by people who are new. They are respected by people who have lived here. Eliza was out there, she was the second person I met. Her sense of place, you don't have to generate it; it's here. That's what is so magic to me is that it's here and you need to look at it and, again, there is nobody who is right or wrong. You know, the people who aren't looking at it are not perpetrators. They just need to learn. And who teaches them? How do you learn that? The fruit basket. When they come in, I give them a reading list and I give them a tour. I try to. I do. When I meet a person who is new, I try to go, "Oh," especially if they have a dog, I point out which dogs live at which house. It's always a challenge because when somebody moves in and I am the welcome wagon, I used to actually go and knock on doors but now there's so many people, I can't. Especially with all the people who are renting. Just to kind of point out, and it's always the good points, it's not too deep. It's mostly like "So-and-so lives there. They've been here so long and they do such-and-such for a living, and they have so many kids, and they are wonderful people." Because I do say that, every single neighbor I have, even if I kind of don't like them that much, there is something really good about them that makes them my neighbor and you have to see what's good about your neighbor because you have to live with next door to them. For me, that's what I realized about myself is that I was not happy with these new people moving in. They were behaving in ways I did not like but they're my neighbors so I have to adapt to them also because they're not going anywhere. They just moved here and this is now their place. Right? So I have to accept them even though I don't like them because if I

36:42	am mean to them, they're aren't going anywhere. So, when I get my magic wand and I wave it and I become queen, what will happen here, my fantasy kingdom is that we will somehow find the money and we are going to purchase the entire street and put it in a land trust and we'll build houses in a certain way so we can preserve a lot of this open space, but we'll do it smart. We're going to get developed. You know, there's population pressure and everything. But to do it in such a way that it can preserve a lot of the natural, open space because the idea of the wildlife corridor, the ground water can be recharged. Because it's not happening now because you have to get permits and pave, pave, pave for parking. Somehow I think it's possible if we had time, money, dedication that it could happen because the raw materials are here and we just need to do it in a smart way to actually meet the needs of the people and not meet the needs of the banks and the developers who want to make money. Because that was the NOBE thing. They changed our name and everyone knows what happens with NOBE and there are people who – the realtors, their interests is not in the people who live here, they want to maximize their prophet because they need to make a living so they can feed their children but did they have to make that much money? And how come – we just have to think different. That's my feelings. Everyone is like oh gentrification is
38:17	inevitable. No. It's not. We are smart enough, we have seen it happen poorly. Why can't we do it smart this way. So, I think that's my fantasy for the future for this block is that we're able to develop higher in the front, and build some houses and leave a lot of open space for animals and for the birds. Do you hear them singing? It's beautiful around here. **(Audio Ends)**



"I WOULD LIKE THE LIBRARY TO BE MORE OF A PART OF PEOPLE'S REGULAR LIFE."

–Sharon Vaughn

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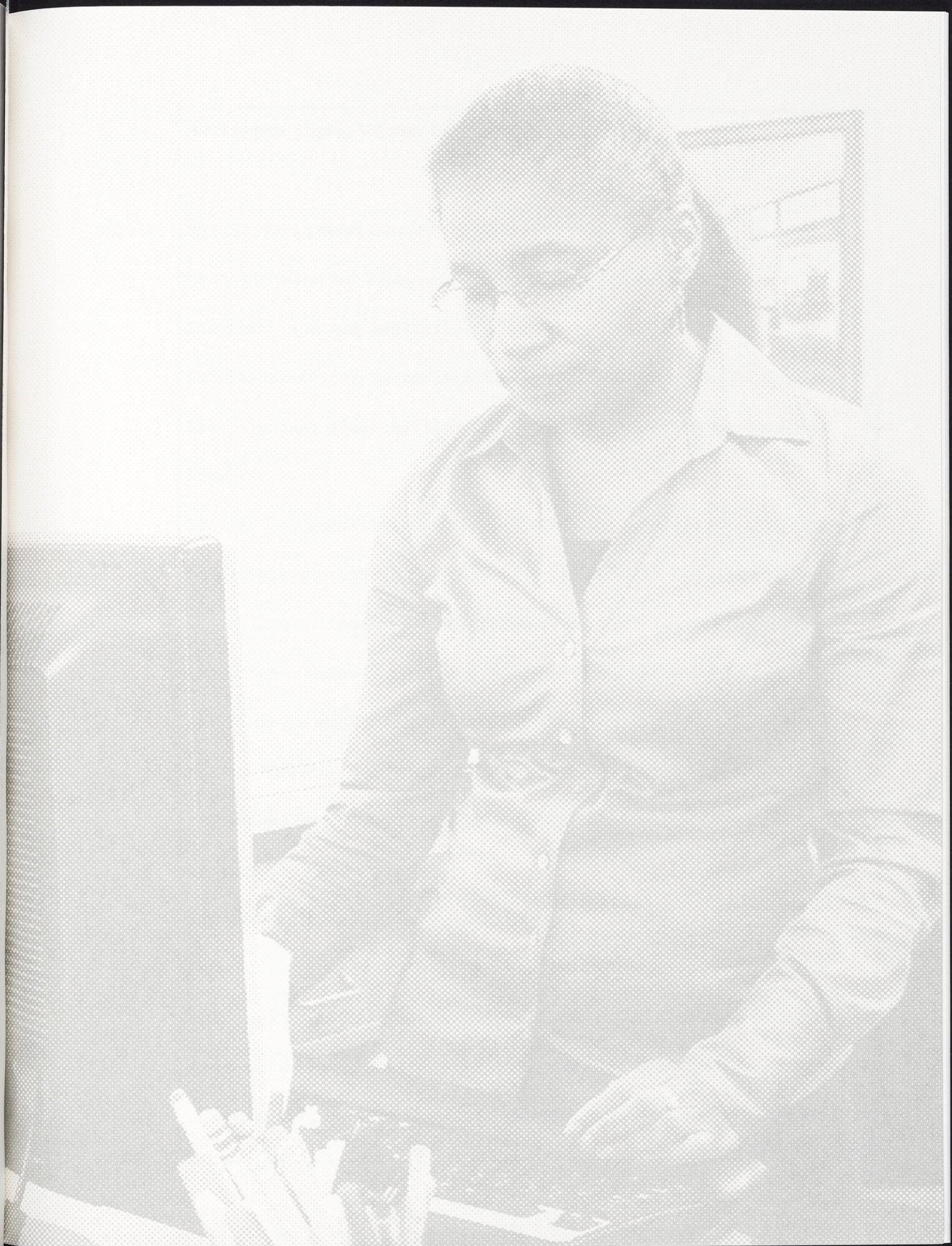

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Sharon Vaughn, 2015

Photo by Sue Mark

	marksearch_Sharon Vaughn 1/21/2015 Video Transcript
00:03	**Sharon:** Well, people are really happy that we're back open. They have come bearing gifts and just telling us how much they appreciate us being back. **Sue Mark:** How long was the library closed? **Sharon:** Mid-October till last week, the 10th. So, almost three months, not quite. **SM:** What have people said to you about what they missed the most from the library? **Sharon:** They haven't been specific about what they've missed. The staff, because I have often gotten lots of compliments from patrons about staff in general at Golden Gate and how friendly and helpful we are. And that's probably the case at some other branches too, but I think it is particularly the case here. **SM:** So, do you want to start off by saying your name? **Sharon:** Sure. My name is Sharon Vaughn and I work as a library assistant at the Golden Gate Branch Library. I started in September of 2000, so I have been here for 14 years now. Quite incredible. **SM:** How did you decide to work in the library? **Sharon:** I had just quit working at Mill's College and I wanted a position where I could work with children. My background is in education, but I didn't want to teach. A friend of mine who used to be the former children's library in here, told me about
01:47	an opening for a homework assistance program coordinator at the library. And I

	thought, oh that sounds perfect. It was part time, but that worked for me also and that's how I got started. That was one of the most fun parts about working here was doing that after school homework program. We seemed to have a lot more families with children back then, of course. Since we had the program there were people coming after school every day to get help with their homework and snacks and enrichment programs. I miss that program and I miss the library during that period. **SM:** Why did that program stop? **Sharon:** Funding ending. It was grant funded. **SM:** What else do you remember from that time period?
02:43	**Sharon:** That we were fully staffed; the budget cuts hadn't started. We had seemingly a lot more programs to offer for teens and did a lot more outreach in the schools and the neighborhood. There seemed to be – it seemed to be more vibrant to me back then; the branch seemed to be hopping all the time and it was always hustle and bustle and a lot going on. I miss that. **SM:** How do you know who comes to the library, where they come from? **Sharon:** Well, everybody has to do an application, so I do get to see the addresses and I would say that a large percent of the population is in the neighborhood or fairly close by, Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville. And then we do get a number of people from other cities in California. Because you just have to be a California Resident to get an Oakland library card. But mostly people around here, I think.

04:05	**SM:** What kinds of stories do people share with you about the neighborhood? How you got to know the Golden Gate neighborhood by being here? **Sharon:** How have I gotten to know the neighborhood? I am getting stumped on that one. Well, there are members of the friends that live in the neighborhood who have talked to me about how much it has changed over the years. You know, I live in the neighborhood now. I moved here about a year ago. I used to live out by Mill's College. Initially, some people were telling me not to move because it wouldn't be a good move, that it wasn't a very, in some aspects, not a very safe neighborhood as where I was coming from but I have not found that to be the case and I've been really happy with the move and the people I've met. I attended the first, I can't think of what it's called now. The neighborhood night out party that they have once a year. I attended that where they block off a part of the street and have a
05:22	barbeque and invite the neighbors and that was really fun. **SM:** What kinds of things happened at that event? **Sharon:** Of course, lots of children playing and adults catching up because even though you live in a neighborhood, you don't necessarily get out and see your neighbors as much as you might like. So, that was an opportunity for people to talk and catch up and talk about what's going on in the neighborhood, what they like, what they don't like. There was some talk about neighborhood services not being what they used to be. Just with the economy and things going down, people are less pleased with what they're getting for their money sometimes in terms of

06:37	services. But it still – I think people have done a good job with upkeep. Sometimes they can look a little tattered and torn around here but, you know, I think in some respects it's coming back to life. (0:6:49.8) There seem to be a lot more cafés along San Pablo Avenue that seem to be doing quite well. And I like being within walking distance of so many conveniences. **SM:** What are some conveniences that you enjoy? **Sharon:** Well, certainly, all the eating places, Doyle Street Café and the Actual Café, the movie theatre is very close by, Trader Joes, the parks – lots of parks in the neighborhood. It is just very walkable. **SM:** What have been some of your favorite things about being here at this library over the years?
07:45	**Sharon:** The brightness, I like the building itself. The oldness of the – I mean, I think it was built in 1918, so it just has a – I don't know what the word is to use. It just has a good feeling or a good sense here that I don't get at some other libraries that I visit and there's a lot of appreciation for the library and the neighborhood people are very vocal about saying how much they appreciate our being here and what we do for the community. I think it is not as much as a community center or hub as I would like for it to be. I think we could be doing a lot more in that respect. But people do appreciate what we do offer, what we do have available here. I wish we got used a little more. **SM:** Have you seen that change over the years?

09:23	**Sharon:** Like I said, the numbers seem to be up when I first started – for a number of years after I started. I haven't seen, I don't know the actual numbers, but there just seems to have been a decline over the years in terms of people coming through the doors. There may be lack of staffing and outreach like we used to do more frequently to bring people, to actually bring people in. Visiting the neighborhood schools and talking to parents and letting them know what services we have available and what programs we have available. Because a lot of people still don't know what a wealth of information that the library can provide for them. **SM:** What have you heard in the neighborhood about NOBE? **SM:** NOBE? I haven't heard about NOBE. I think you may have mentioned it to me. What does it stand for, again? **SM:** North Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville. Yeah. I haven't heard about it.
10:40	**SM:** What have your relationships been like since you've moved into the neighborhood? Do you feel a changed kind of relationship or is it sort of the same in terms of who you know and how you get to know them? **Sharon:** Well, I haven't gotten to know many more people since I've moved to the neighborhood. Since I have lived in the neighborhood so long, the people that I know – I haven't met any new ones, I guess you could say. Well, that's not true, actually, the people on my street. **SM:** How do you get to know the people on your street? **Sharon:** There was only that one opportunity at the Neighborhood Night Out. I am

11:45	a walker, so I get out and walk quite a bit but I don't run into people – well, that's not true either. I do run into people sometimes on the street who live in the neighborhood and we'll stop and just chat a bit, you know, just "Hello. How you doing? How's your day?" But really getting to know, I haven't outside of the neighborhood events that we have. There is another person who comes frequently. Now, what is it that you want me to (0:12:09.6) –
	SM: I am just curious. I just have an imagination about the library and, you know, what it is for very regular people. It becomes, in my mind, a second home, a second safe place, a place that people recognize you.
12:37	**Sharon:** Oh. It is. That's one thing I like too. Because when I am out and about, I get lots of recognition because I work at the library. "Mommy, mommy, there's the library lady." You know, in the grocery store they'll come over and say hi. I do like that kind of recognition. I think for the library, like for some people, the regulars, we do have people who come on a regular basis, at least weekly, some even daily and just hang out, do whatever they need to do on their laptops. They like the fact that it is for the most part quiet although in some respects not as quiet as it used to be. Um, and they just like have a calm, like you say safe, relatively safe place to come and do what it is they need to do. And we have people who put their books on hold and they come by weekly to pick up their books and it's just a part of their regular routine, the library. I think that's what I would like for us to be, more of a part of people's regular life or routine in some way. That people have some kind of

13:50	regular connection with the library. **SM:** How do you think that could happen? (0:13:50.4) **Sharon:** How could that happen? Well, certainly we would have to be providing something that people feel like they need on a regular basis and I don't know if we still do that for everybody. Then I think offer a lot more in terms of programing that I think people would come out for, if not on a regularly basis, certainly monthly have something at the library that would draw people here on a monthly basis. **SM:** How do you think the Saturday hours have changed? **Sharon:** I think that it will help. You know, we were Tuesday through Saturday; we switched and now we're going back. So, I think that's what the bulk of people who did the survey want, the Saturday hours. I think that's good. We were busy on Saturdays. We got lots of use on Saturdays. And we can offer more programs on Saturdays when people are off work and have more leisurely time to attend events and hang out.
15:14	**SM:** Do you want to talk about what was next door? **Sharon:** Next door, we had the God Speed, motorcycle shop next door to the library and that was fun while it lasted except for the noise of the motorcycles. But it was another place for the staff to go and hang out, or grab some lunch, or a bite or a snack. The people there were very nice and friendly and somewhat protective too. There had been times when we had some incidents with difficult patrons and the police hadn't gotten her quite quick enough and the guys had offered to come

16:11	over and kind of be a presence until things were safe again or handled certain situations. So, they were very helpful. I actually miss them. **SM:** Do you remember approximately when they were here? (0:16:11.4) **Sharon:** Seems like they've been gone at least a year, maybe a couple years and I think they were there at least a year, maybe longer. I am kind of fuzzy on the timeline. **SM:** And can you tell me a little bit more about why you decided to move to this neighborhood or what that process was like for you? **Sharon:** Well, I wanted to be closer to work, not that commuting from Mill's College was that much of a commute, but it could be at a certain time of morning. I wanted a place, really, where I could walk to work and so I got it and the rent is reasonable and I like the neighborhood. Where I was living was not a walkable neighborhood so it's just great. I don't have to use my car as much, getting a lot more exercise and I am within walking distance of the Emeryville Marina, which is just gorgeous. So, it's got a lot of pluses and I really can't think of any minuses. **SM:** What was the process like when you were looking for an apartment? Did you do it on your own?
17:28	**Sharon:** I did it on my own. I didn't – and I talked to people actually here at Golden Gate, letting people know that I was looking to move to the neighborhood, and I did get a few leads. None of those worked out, so the place I ended up getting I got on my own. Craigslist, I think. Yeah. Just happen to work out perfectly. And of course,

	the competition was high so I was quite pleased to make the cut. **SM:** Do you remember how many people you were competing with? **Sharon:** I would have to ask my landlord again, but I am not sure about the number, but it was quite a few. You know, people willing to plop down cash right
18:18	away and, you know. But this is wonderful because I got a plug. One of our regular patrons lives across the street from my landlord and she had talked to her and told her that she was looking for a new tenant and that I had applied. And she was like, "Oh. You got to rent to Sharon. She's wonderful." So, I had a shoe in because somebody from the library knew me and put in a good word. So, that was great. It's wonderful to have those kinds of connections. **SM:** What about community groups with the library? Who is connected in terms of community groups? **Sharon:** Yeah. The Friends meet here once a month. I don't know how long they have been – they've been around a long time. I don't remember when they were created. That number has dwindled too, the number of active members in the Friends. That's something that I would like to help boost again. Then there is – I can't think of it – NCPC? Seems like they've had some meetings here on a regular
19:39	basis. They meet at the Golden Gate Rec. Center now I think. But we've had them meet here on occasion. And we will (0:19:51.7) get calls occasionally from groups in the community who want to come and have meetings, so our meeting room is available for those kinds of things.

20:51	**SM:** Can you talk a little about who were Friends, and what they did? **Sharon:** Let's see who belongs – you mean? **SM:** Who is part of the Friends group? **Sharon:** Right now I think we're at about five or six who attend our meetings regularly. Mrs. Josephine Lee is the president of Friends and Larry Benson who used to be a regularly patron, who doesn't come as much, but he's a member, one of the library commissioners used to be a member of our Friends group. I would like to have more patrons, I think. You know, people who visit the library frequently, more involved to get a sense of how the Friends can be more helpful to the library. **SM:** What kinds of things have they done? **Sharon:** Mostly a lot of help or assistance in continuing the Summer Jazz series. Which is in its 25th year. This one coming up this summer will be the 25th annual one. So, that's the bulk of the work that the Friends do for the library. We can also turn to the Friends when we need help with the library funding for certain library programs because the city doesn't offer as much, you know, programming monies they use. We give a monthly report to The Friends in terms of how many people are coming and what programs we're doing and they often ask, you know, if there's anything you need. **SM:** What's the demographic in terms of age and diversity? **Sharon:** Age, there's not much diversity, unfortunately. I would like to get some younger people on. It's mostly an older group. And actually one of the current

22:50	library commissioners attends regular meetings too. Ruby, I can't think of Ruby's last name right now, but she's been very gung ho about getting the library back up to full use again and getting lots more programming, and doing – she's done a lot of community outreach to schools and I am hoping that soon we'll kind of see some benefits to that, what she's been doing in terms of talking up Golden Gate and getting more activity here. **SM:** And do you feel like the library is in a stable position or risky position? **Sharon:** I can't say stable because there is still talk of budget cuts and we're not back up to – I don't know if we'll ever be back up to full funding. When I started (0:23:26.7) we were getting a certain amount of money from the general fund for the library and that's way down now. I don't know if we'll ever get back up to where we used to be. **SM:** What do you remember about the Lasartemays' collection? Did you hear things about that? They ran the East Bay Negro Historical Society. **Sharon:** You know, I have heard people mention that it used to be housed here. I haven't heard people talk much about, you know, the content or the collection. **SM:** Can you say that again just say it with the name of the group instead of it? **Sharon:** Oh, ok. What was it called? The African American – I can't remember. **SM:** They called it the East Bay Negro Historical Society. **Sharon:** But it used to be here at Golden Gate? **SM:** Yeah. So, the East Bay Negro Historical Society was started by the Lasartemays
23:26	

24:57	and then they had their collection here in the children's section of the library. Then they got the (Inaudible) (0:24:57.6). **Sharon:** So, it was different when it was here. East Bay Negro Historical Society, um, yeah, I think it had just, I am not sure when it ended, when that transition was made but it was before I got here in 2000. **SM:** And what would people ask you about it? **Sharon:** Well, they would just mention that it used to be here and they wonder what happened to it. **SM:** Anything else you want to mention about the library? You talked before about that there was a Festival of Lights that used to be here? **Sharon:** Well, we still have it. We just skipped a couple of years. No, we had it last year. We skipped the year before that. But yeah, every year for the last 14 years of no longer, we have been having Diwali (Phonetics), the national – not national. Every 14 years …
26:12	Matt: We have to start from the beginning, as though we didn't hear any of it. **SM:** Tell me, Sharon, about the festival of lights that's been here at the library. **Sharon:** So, when I started here in 2000 the Festival of Lights was already going. That may have been the first year. I am not sure. But, we invite Indian dancers to come and we decorate the meeting room downstairs with lots of lights and colorful cloths that we've gotten from India. And it had always been a very well-attended program. We feed people afterwards. We have a big reception upstairs and people

27:45	love it. It's one of our most well attended and one of the programs I think the branch is known for. The numbers have dwindled. I have noticed the number attending have dwindled also. I don't know what that is. There don't seem to be as many patrons coming from Indian background as used to be. The numbers were, seemed really large when I first started and I think a lot of people have moved out of the neighborhood. So, but they were very appreciative to have that cultural thing here in the neighborhood. It's been a big hit and we're planning to have it again this year, although we missed last year. It was right before the closure. It usually happens late October, early November. **SM:** Can you talk a little bit more about the summer jazz? What happens? Who comes? Why is it so popular? **Sharon:** The Summer Jazz program usually starts the first Sunday in July and runs for eight weeks. The Friends select local Jazz performers to come and it's always, during the 14 years I've worked here, generally on Sunday afternoons, standing room only. I mean, the music is good; it's free and it's in the neighborhood. It's in a very comfortable setting. Some people hear the music and just pop in. Then we have the regulars that come who've been coming for years and still come.
29:20	**SM:** The people who come, do you know where they're from? **Sharon:** I think they're from everywhere. No. I think most of the people that come are from outside the neighborhood, although, we do get a lot of neighborhood people. Maybe they used to live in the neighborhood and they've moved away but

	they still come back for the summer jazz program. **SM:** So, the people who come have a connection to the neighborhood? **Sharon:** I think so. Or certainly if they don't – yeah. There seem to be a big chunk of people who have a connection to each other just because they've been attending it for so long and they know each other – some of them seem to know each other outside of the Summer Jazz Program. Mrs. Josephine can talk more about that. It's
30:18	just fun. Yeah, people really love it. Then they have a big party on the last Sunday after the music is done and we feed people, so that's always a big plus too. You get to sit and listen to music and enjoy good food. **SM:** And where does the party happen? **Sharon:** Out in the parking lot. **SM:** Are there any other programs that you want to highlight that you think are important? **Sharon:** No. I mean, the ones that come to mind are ones that we no longer do, although I wouldn't mind bringing some of them back. **SM:** Can you give me a for instance? **Sharon:** We used to have a chess program here at Golden Gate; that was very popular with the teens, the girls and the boys, actually and the little ones. So, it got
31:11	the kids in and they were very good. I think the Golden Gate Team attended and won a number of awards at, you know, chess tournaments. So, that I miss 'cause it brought more teens and young people into the branch.

	SM: And who organized that?
	Sharon: That was Don Waters who was the senior library assistant when I first started working here. He retired a number of years ago. Sorely missed, he was a real go-getter and a real magnet for young people being at the library.
	SM: Any other programs that you can think of?
32:03	**Sharon:** In the past, we've had a number of sleep-overs where we've invited, I am not sure if it was first and second graders, or second and third graders. But those have been fun where the children's library and another staff member would be here and we would welcome the kids after school. We'd have a program loosely set up for them. You know, storytime, games, maybe a movie or a video and they would just get to hang out and spend the night at the library. So we had the girls sleep upstairs and we had the guys sleep downstairs with a male staff member. It was just really fun, that kind of thing. It's been awhile since we've done that.
	SM: Is the building haunted?
	Sharon: No. Some people would say.. Ha ha. I've heard stories.
	SM: What kind of stories?
	Sharon: I am not familiar with any. Well, there was one custodian who used to work here who said he heard strange noises early in the mornings when he would clean here.
33:03	**SM:** What kind of strange noises?
	Sharon: He wasn't specific. I didn't inquire. But I have seen no signs of hauntedness

	since I've worked here. **SM:** Any other stories? That was the only one? **Sharon:** That was the only one. **SM:** Can we talk a little bit about what has happened with these? **Sharon:** We can. **SM:** 'Cause I am kind of curious. So can you just say when they appeared?
33:47	**Sharon:** See, I don't remember. When did you start? Several months ago? **SM:** In July, I think. So you could say "So, they appeared in July. (0:33:47.8) **Sharon:** In July these colorful bookmarks with Klinknerville.org (Phonetics) suddenly appeared in a large part of the library's collection. And patrons who were fortunate enough to grab a book that had a bookmark in it would come to the desk and go, "What's this" and we would mention Sue and the project that she has going with the – I described it as a historical – a project about the history of the neighborhood. People were generally very interested and I would encourage them to visit the website: klinknerville.org, and to read the cards that we – the laminated cards that we have at the front desk. People seemed generally interested and very eager to find out more about the history of the neighborhood. "Oh, I didn't know that," they'd read something, and say "Oh, that's very interesting" or "I didn't know that." **SM:** what do you think that the library could do, or I could help the library do to let
35:23	people know more about local history or how to get at local history?

	Sharon: I would have to give that some more thought. I don't really know. I think I want us to do something more because I think the information is – that a lot more people would like to have it. I don't know how we could make it readily accessible. I would like for there to be something that people could see. I don't know if we could have, you know, some kind of installment of pictures of the neighborhood from way back when, I don't know. A special collection, what is it called? Exhibit, that's the word I am after. Some kind of special exhibit about the project or the neighborhood. And something for people – I don't know if people would have anything to contribute. You know, either artifacts you could contribute or stories to contribute. But just make it some kind of interactive neighborhood get-together. I
36:51	don't know what it would look like but I think it would be fun to do.
	SM: Well, it's a work in progress.
	Sharon: It is, and I am glad you've started it because I think it's very important.
	SM: Is there anything else that you want to add, Sharon?
	Sharon: No. There's nothing else.
	Matt: I was curious, did you grow up in Oakland and if so, where?
	Sharon: No. I moved to Oakland in 1997. I am from Mississippi. I moved here from Mississippi in 1997. I really haven't looked back.
	Matt: What were your early impressions of, I guess, we're mostly interested in this neighborhood but what did Oakland seem like to you when you – coming from Mississippi, I mean, what was it like to be here?

	Sharon: Oh, my gosh. Well, quite a – look at sue – quite a drastic change for me. A small town in Mississippi to a big urban area, so in some ways very frightening but very exciting because I moved from there to Mills College. It was almost like moving to paradise in a sense. Very beautiful campus, very beautiful place actually, lots more to see and do than there is in Oxford, Mississippi. So, it was a very positive move for me and I had not gotten very much support from people at home in terms of moving to California, 'cause you know how strange and crazy those people are
38:48	out there, and, you know, it's a God forsaken place, yeah, just very negative connotations and I have not found them to be true at all.
	SM: What brought you to Mills?
	Sharon: A job. I was engaged at the time and my then to be husband got a teaching position at Mill's College, so that was the impetus for moving here. Yeah, so that was a great setting to ease into and to get me used to being in a large city 'cause campus is like a community on its own and we lived on campus so that was a good transition. It didn't seem quite as big and frightening of a place.
	SM: I have one last question and I don't know if it has anything to do with the project; it's just my own curiosity: what are some of the most popular questions or most frequent questions that people ask you here at the library?
	Sharon: I should have given that some thought. Most frequent question.... Oh you don't want to know the most frequent questions because it's just about finding
40:11	things. You know, where's this, where's that? Recently, there was a project at the

	Oakland Public Library, in terms of they interviewed or solicited answers to just that question from different locations. I don't think we participated but very interesting one. I can't – I don't have any. Most interesting.... I know there've been some. **SM:** Do people ask you about the bell out front? **Sharon:** People ask about the bell out front; they ask about the flag that's in the foyer. **SM:** So, what do you tell them about the bell? **Sharon:** I refer them to this little blurb that we have on the website. And I actually did a little research about it. I went online and did a little research and I would print it out and give it to the guy, told him where he could get more detailed information
41:14	if he needed. The little plaque is stolen, so. But no, I don't remember the details about how it got here. And they ask about – **SM:** And what's the flag? **Sharon:** It was draped – I can't remember that story either. I don't even want to try. We'll have to read the thing on the way out. People do ask those kind of questions and they want to know about the history of the branch: how old it is, has it always been a library, that kind of thing. The quilts that used to hang, they would ask about the quilts.
41:58	**(Audio Ends)**

"THE CULTURE OF BLACK PEOPLE THAT USED TO BE HERE, THAT'S GONE ALTOGETHER."

–Fred Williams

"THE CULTURE OF BLACK PEOPLE
THAT USED TO BE HERE, THAT'S
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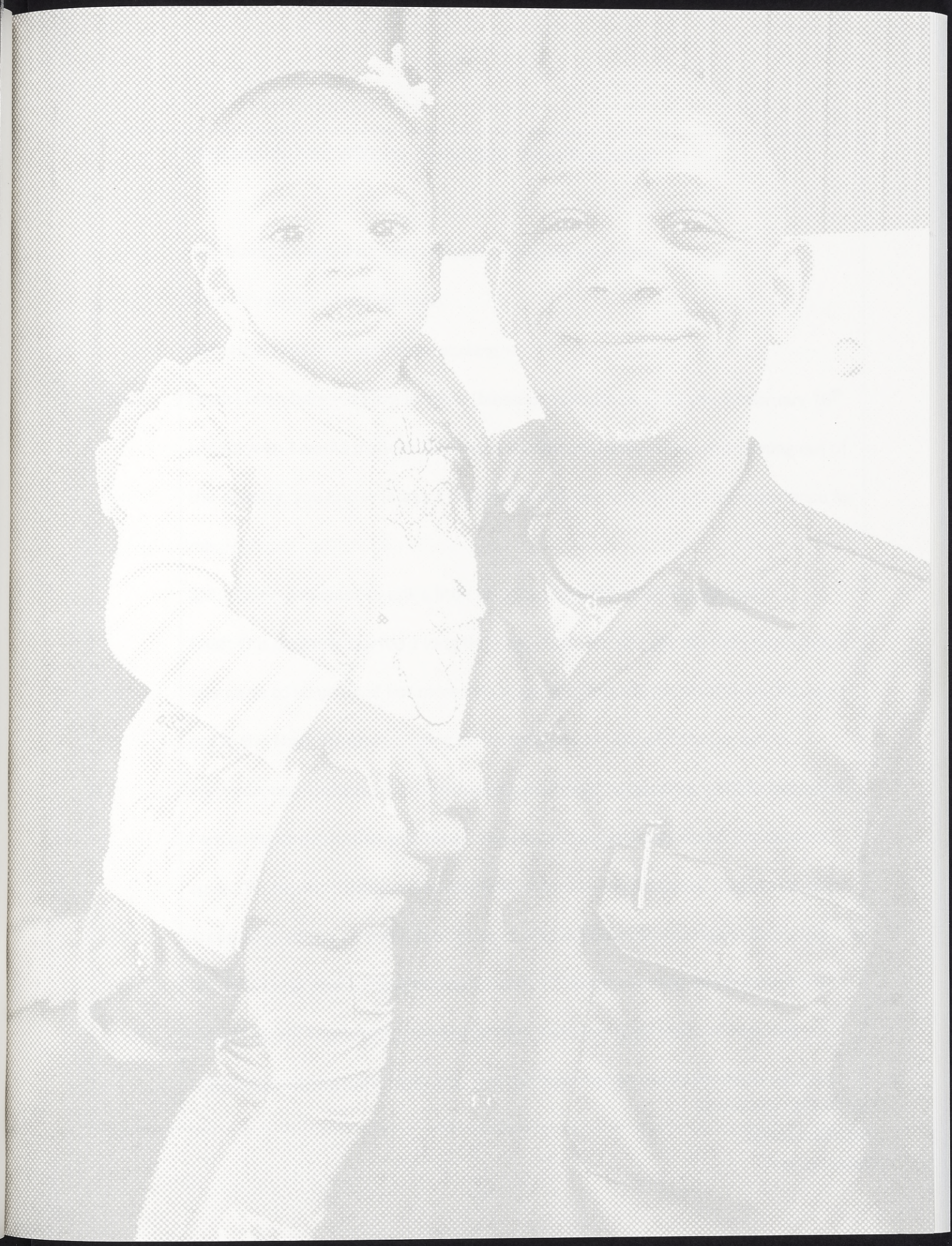

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Fred Williams, 2015

Photo by Sue Mark

	marksearch_Fred Williams 1/30/ 2015 Video Transcript
	Sue Mark: So, let's just start off with you saying your name.
	Fred: My name is Fred Williams.
	SM: How long have you been working –
00:09	**Fred:** I been here – if I live to see it, blessing, I should be at 33 years February 10th of this year. I would be here 33 years. I started out really young and coming out of the country, you know. It was a big experience for me, a really great experience for me.
	SM: So, do you want to talk a little bit about how this business started?
	Fred: This business started a long time ago. Now, we can get the date down, but it was close to 50 years, if not more. My uncle who retired, not retired, did his years out in the Navy, he end up being discharged into the Naval F Station out in Alameda, not Alameda, Treasure Island. Get it right because he went to both jobs. I am going to get to that job thing 'cause he quit his job over there with women, again. So, he was discharged in Alameda. I keep saying Alameda, forgive me, but Treasure Island so he was either going to stay in Pensacola, Florida or California. So, on his way over to downtown Oakland, 7th Street, actually. Back in the early
01:30	'60s 7th Street was where the black people, that was their place of hang out. Nothin but black people, the clubs and the food that whole down there, actually

	where the post office is now, the big post office down on 7th Street. Well, a long time ago, back in them days, in the '60s and even in late '65, '66, '67 there was nothing there. It was all a black area at that time. Business was there so he was headed to one of the night clubs there because that's where everybody went to go hang out at the time. So, he was in the car with the taxi cab driver and the taxi cab driver, you know, they got to talking where he was from, Alabama, you know, a little, small town – we got this joke that you could hold your breath and you could just drive right through the town, right, which is true. He told him, he said "Well,
02:05	I'll tell you this, if you stay here six months and get a job you'll never go back" and that was the beginning of the story. He was here. He got a good job for Lockheed Martin (2:18.0) at the time because he eventually worked for Kaiser with the military stuff.
	SM: Do you remember what year he came out here?
	Fred: Sharon was born in '54, it had to be early '59, '58, '60. I got to think. I wish I knew for sure exactly but it was really in the early, early '60s when he came here. Yeah, early, early '60s because I remember him telling me stories about how he had a Mustang. So, it was the early '60s, somewhere in there when he came here. But he wasn't with Sharon's mom at that time, he was with – and she was a
03:04	beautiful woman, she was lighter than me. She was a beautiful women. Let's what really kind of draw him out. He's always loved women. He was a young man. You got to realize he was in his early 20s and you know you see him dressing like a

	Navy guy, you know. So, he was able to persuade a lot of women into be his friend. Her name was Margie. They end up getting married and she was a beautiful woman. I some of the older pictures. She was. You know, you see his complexion and he is darker than night and we called him "Night and Day." So, she was a beautiful woman. He said "They tried to get me to re-enlist, but man." This woman had a good job and so "I am going to stay out." So, he stayed out and they got married. They had a son together. Unfortunately, about 20 years ago, his name was Jerome, we lived together for a while. We was roommates. He passed away right across the street over there in a fire. We believe that he was smoking in bed. He passed away and that was something tuff for Pop to get over. But he did. He wouldn't even go in that back yard for years because his body was burnt into the concrete, the shape, you know what I mean? So, he didn't go back over there for
04:27	years. It took him many years to go back over there. It was tough for him. Jerome – **SM:** Let's talk a little bit about how you started all this. **Fred:** This came about, there was a guy on University, I believe it was 1916 San Pablo Avenue cross street with University. He was workin with this guy who sold furniture and washing machines, right. He said the guy was very smart and he told him if you want to branch off, you can branch off but whatever you do do the appliance of property living, like the furniture business. I actually learned a lot more about the furniture business. I didn't know how profitable the furniture business can be, but it can be. They talked about him opening up a place of his

05:36	own but just to sell washing machines. So, those days they was selling for $50 apiece and we was selling GE washing machines and amazing because GE washing machines, there so much labor intense. There's so much work involved to repair a GE washer but in them days people GE, GE was the appliance so he started on the GEs and at that time he was working for Kaiser at that time and again, I believe she was his number 4th wife, married, was a San Francisco nurse and she was (Inaudible 5:47.9) and she was the one who kind of funded this business in the beginning. So, he opened up the place across the street over there just selling washing machines. **SM:** How'd he decide on that spot? **Fred:** It was cheap at the time in prices, you know, amazing. You have to understand, this area didn't look like this. This area at that time there was really nothing but black people around here. It was really run down. We had prostitutes all up and down the street. There was a few other older businesses that was here. Bait shop that was down the street. People had been in the community for years up and down here. At that time property was high; it was high now, granted because these are (Inaudible) whereas what we're paying for cars today you could buy a house back then, two or three houses. So, he always said that that was really unfair that the change that, you can't live in a car. So, he was able to get that property really inexpensive at that time. And I don't know the exact amount he paid for it but – and he lived upstairs so that how he was able to do it. He had the

07:02	business downstairs and he lived upstairs. That was easy for him. Over time the busy, it actually got busy. There was a few people what had so many people been through here. A lot of people have people have passed away that we owe a lot of credit to. I know he does because he would help people right off the street. In those days, it was just a tough area. The drugs was heavy, you know. It went through that period drug period through the area here. Prostitution was off the change. It was incredible. Beautiful women, mind ya'. I am not going to say – beautiful women on the street but – they was amazing. **SM:** So, he bought that place around? **Fred:** That'd be the early '60s. I want to say like maybe '61. **SM:** The early '60s this neighborhood was already a tough place? **Fred:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Now, it was a lot of working families. We had housing. If you look around, before they put all these different buildings in there was a lot of community housing around here. People needed work but you still, you had the night life. Because it was the bars up the street, there was a lot of bars up the street so Johnny's 77, people would know it. It was up there. It was a nice bar but
08:12	it attracted people so it was just tough times back then, but again, his focus was he always wanted to have his own. He felt like the Navy taught him – it was hard to take orders. Look at this story, and really changed his mind. He worked on aircraft and they was takin, we've all seen the big elevator they take the planes on, well, their boss told them to take the plane to see if it was rough and they was sayin'

09:01	"We should wait" but the boss "No. You take it up now." So, they scrapped the plane down and they was raising it up and it got away. The plane went overboard and you know you always have someone sitting inside the plane, jumped out. They watched the plane go overboard. Now, when they go before the commanders, their boss said "I didn't tell them to do." So, they all got busted in rank. Nothing happened to him. Pop said that was a turning straw for him and he always wanted to have his own after that 'cause he knew, basically, ain't nobody going to tell the truth when inn t and he learned. That's another reason way I got to let this Navy go. So, this guy, and I am going to keep it real, he called him s Jew guy. He said this was a Jew guy, he was very smart with is money, that had the place, the furniture store, down on San Pablo. And they bonded that so that they would connect and he would get appliances from him to bring over here to sell. While he was working at Kaiser and Lockheed Martin (Phonetics 9:51.5), they was workin' on a Polaris with a (Inaudible) I don't know if we allowed to say that but it is. It was back in the day. This business started growing so he eventually quit the job. He actually just didn't show up anymore.
10:08	**SM:** How did he get customers? How did people come? **Fred:** Because of the area. Again, because of the area it was many black at that time. People didn't have money. Even in those days $50 washing machine, wow. I mean I really should in detail look at the old receipts. $50 for a washing machine, even though it was a lot of money, and he delivered it. And he would hire people

	off the street to come and go with me to just make a couple of dollars to take the deliveries and it was a self-run business. I give this guy credit. He's not here now. His name was Ronny Summers. He was here to help Pop at the time. When Pop was working at the other job Ronny would be here to kind of move things along. Eventually, you know, you know, Ronny was a little guy that went to Berkeley and he had to do his own thing and left but Pop still kept goin'. So, gradually, and I am gonna tell ya' something, this would be and definitely this still would be, and you got to be at it. You cannot stop. And he was here every day and even before he died he used to tell me that, "You got to be here every day." He was committed because you got to keep the doors open. If you are goin' to have any business, people look at how long you keep the doors open. That's another reason why we
11:15	don't have to advertise so much now because people still see that I don't get the appliances I have out front any more but people see the doors are still open. If you have consistency, I mean, they saw that old van, old truck every day – every day they saw it and they said that people look at you when they can physically see the person who's runnin' the place. The person who runnin' the place, if he's excited about the place that would actually get people to come in and the gift that will give them is good customer service and, believe it or not, old GE washer, once you fixed it, they reliable. They was only 12 to 16 pounds. I remember that too good. The thing, tub, was so small. Twelve pounds? C'mon. But they were reliable and once you fixed 'em, and most of ''em just needed a belt and a pump on 'em, you

	know. In them days I believe a pump was about $3.00. A belt was what, a dollar and a half? So, even if you sold it for $50 you still made at least $35 - $40 profit. If you do that enough, then naturally your business will grow. So, eventually he did, he growed. Sorry, he grew. I am country. He grew and we ended up getting this place here. Like I said, He used to own the place across the street. That used to be the warehouse. He used to keep all the appliances in there. 'Cause we used to all wonder why "Pop, Pop, we got more than we need here, man. Why you keep buying more and more appliances?" Because, you never knew when it would all stop. Then what you gonna do? Basically, that's what happenin' here now.
12:45	Because before we used to have, again, so many trucks delivering appliances to us, we getting ready to close, man, you know, we young, "C'mon, Pop. It's time to go." Pop said "We got to take those appliances." So, naturally we took the appliances and we had 'em everywhere. I mean, when Pop passed we had over 30 years of appliances. I had one, two, three giant sized 40 – 50 foot storage where we had all these appliances. This is true. I had – the storage place made a fortune off of us because at the time I didn't have nowhere to put all these things. We had to put them into storage. We had the storage for over a year. Over a year, yes. At four and five hundred a month, trying to put all these appliances that we had and we still got more appliances. We're talkin' almost 50 years of appliances and we watched the appliance industry change but back to Pop, Pop was just a determined man. He was determined to be a self-employed, and not have to ask

	anybody for anything. And it ended up being that way. I mean, he died, unfortunately for me and everybody – I miss him, oh my God. I miss him so much. We talked almost every day. Me and him had a real tight bond. 76 years old in this day and time to me is a little bit too young. But at the same time, his life, 'cause he told me this, and I got to say it 'cause it's true. He said, "I traveled all over the world, but America is the greatest place on the planet to live. I been all over and I seen everything. America is the greatest land to be." He said "I don't want to go
14:23	nowhere. I was born here. I live here. I am gonna die here." And that's my motto. I was born here. I live here and I'm gonna die here. And I want to see the rest of the world. I do want to see the rest of the world. I don't even know where but at the same time, I know – I trust him that much, America.
	SM: So, what about America?
	Fred: You have the opportunity to do somethin' here if you ain't lazy. There's a lot of places where you don't get that kind of freedom as a black person. You don't get that kind of freedom. Here, if you're not lazy, I don't care what color you are, if you're not lazy you can have it. And that's what he instilled in all of us here. I don't care what. It don't matter, but you can't be lazy. You can't sit at the house. You can't wait for somethin' to happen and you got to be hands on. 'Cause he was hands on. I mean, we had some tough time here and every day you know, also he
15:19	taught us, you know, if you make $1000 today, you don't go out and spend over $1000 just because you made $1000. You put that $1000 up because a slow day is

16:02	coming. And, I mean, there's some days here even now, I mean, some days here, we don't make no money here. He had instilled in me not to go out and just blow it because you had a great week, or a great month, or a great year, you just don't go out and blow it. You save. **SM:** So, why was it important for him to buy property? **Fred:** Now that's a real estate thing. That's a big one. Because, again, we go back to Mary. She had already bought a house. She bought a house in Albany. Beautiful home on Colusa Avenue, the cross street is Marine. Nice area right in there. Nice in there, oh yeah. And in them days there was no black people in there and even when her and Ben moved there, you'd see Sharon. Sharon is black as night. She would come outside and play and all the other kids had to go in the house. They couldn't play with her because they was the only black family on the block. Beautiful house too and they was the only black family on the block in them days. But see, Mary was a classy lady. She believed in education. She believed in hard work. She believed in saving her money. You just didn't go out and buy, and she taught him, you don't get to go and buy a Cadillac, because he loved Cadillacs, right? You don't get to go and buy a Cadillac every year because they come out. You know, you save that money. You don't go get to buy the fancy clothes. You know, he loved cars and clothes. It kept him feelin', you know, we from the south. We grew up in Alabama. We grew up poor. Bottom line, we didn't grow up wanting, now, because food and things, we had plenty to eat. We ate off the land.

17:26	My goodness. We ate good. We made our own food, so whatever it took to make it. So, in his day you only get one pair of pants all year. One pair. The pair you gonna go to school in and the pair you gonna work in. You got an old pair of wraggly shoes, you probably done wore the bottom in, and you gonna work in those. Then you got your shoes that you gonna go to school in. One pair. So, naturally when he was able to get to a point where he could buy him some clothes, and Mary taught him that real estate was the way. She said "Real estate is the way" because you get to rent the property out. You can buy it and make money. It's investment. You know, she taught him about taxes and stuff. Because he knew – Pop had, back in them days, Pop had a shotgun weddin'. What he did was his first wife, I found the marriage certificate, his first wife, Anny, they went to school together and in them days they went to all black school and the little school is still there to this day. It look like a little bitty, small church. It is still there to this day. My mom went through there. My dad went through there and this is back in Ron Oak, Alabama (Phonetics 18:34.7). Then they go to high school, it was in Fire Point, Alabama. So, here you have – you know, and Pop in them days, I'ma tell ya'' something, he was a good lookin' man. I mean, he was a good lookin' young man. He wasn't as black as he was dark skinned. He was still dark but he was a little bit brighter than he was. He told me, I got to say it 'cause he say it true and I believe it. He said "There's nothin' wrong wit' getting old. You just get ugly." That's what he said. So, I mean, if you

19:03	look at some of these people, I'm keepin' it real, you look at some of them young picture, you go "Oh, my goodness." You look at them now, and "I love you baby, but …" You know. Like Pop say, you done got ugly. Back in them days, it was tough business and sex was out of the question. So, but Anny loved herself some Pop. This is a true story. I end up meeting the people. Matter of fact, she just passed recently. Matter of fact, matter of fact, we ain't got to it yet – she was the lady that I stayed with before I came out here and believe it or not, before he died they got a chance to hook up and talk. She told me her and Anny was riding to school, they had to ride a school bus back in the day. Anny went up to her and punched her out. She said, well, she told "Well, Benny" they called him Benny, "Benny must've liked her for doing that because he ended up going to her instead of coming to me, ya' know." So, naturally they slip and she get pregnant. Oh my
20:19	goodness. In them days, in those days they called it *big.* You done got my daughter *big* so you gonna marry her. So, in those days if you didn't marry, you would have gotten killed. They called it shotgun, you would've gotten shot. Mom and dad, a whole lot of them back in them days had a lot of kids, it was easier for them to – less mouths to feed, you see. So, you had to marry her. So, naturally, his parents – I mean, he got it from both ends. His mom and dad, her mom and dad, you got to marry this girl. So, Pop, being as sarcastic as he was, he said "Okay. I'll marry her but you can't make me stay with her." So, he went and they got married at the courthouse. We called it *Lafelt* back there, out here they would call it Lafayette. It

22:06	is spelled the same but we say *Lafelt* back there. So I'm gonna say Lafelt. They got married at the courthouse which immediately he joined the Navy. Pop said – he told 'em, "You can make me marry her, but you can't make me stay." Immediately joined the Navy. He joined the Navy in Westpoint, Georgia, that's where he joined the Navy and he left her to raise the children. And he was so... didn't pay child support. He ended up coming her and he get the rollback check. He was just bad. Now, at the same time he'd go back home and they'd get another baby. So, now he got two babies. And he'd do the same thing. So, he leaves her again and they eventually get a divorce and whatever. She ended up having about eight more children but the good thing about this story on that part was he was able to – we had this big family reunion and I was able to convince Pop, we all should go home for this big family reunion. So, we was all able to go home. In the meantime, his son that was here that he had by her, we all grown now, was here and we all went home to the big family reunion. And what we did is we got her to come to and him and her was able to – now, she lived up in Anison, Alabama and that's a good 45 minute drive maybe, maybe an hour drive and he was able to, for him and her to take that drive and talk. They older now and me and him talked about it and he said "You know, I told her I was sorry. I was sorry how I treated ya''." He meant that. He did. She know he meant it, he was sorry how he treated her. He was just young, you know. He was just young and they never did stop speakin'. I mean, they grew up together in high school and stuff. And he was able and I am glad and

	grateful to God that he was able express that wit her before he leave here. They both gone on now and rested but he was able to express that. He felt good about being able to tell her that.
	SM: How is it that you came here?
23:38	**Fred:** I end up coming here, my dad – and I give him all credit but one of the greatest reasons was how I end up being here. My dad always loved cars and driving fast, and I would tell him, I think about it today and (Inaudible 23:55.4) behind that, how he'd a been a hell of a race car driver. He loved it. Everybody knew (Inaudible) drove fast. You gonna be driving (Inaudible) you better believe he drive fast. I don't know how him and my dad and my uncle here made that pact if somethin' should happen, you know. Again, in them days we lived in this house, my dad, my mom, and my two brothers, we lived in one room together. My grandmother and grandpa lived in this room together. We lived in an old house that looked like this here now and the foundation was old rocks. I wish I could take
24:40	you home sometime and let you see wit your own eyes. You'd be amazed at these places that withstood storms and still standin' today 'cause they was made wit rocks that just put form with shape to hold this house together. So, we living in this house together wit him. Pop was out in the Navy of course, and he would come home and visit and would scare my uncle to death. "Oh, wait a minute. Shoot. You better let me drive." You have to see, you just don't know what's goin' to happen. Somehow they had made some kind of pact. That's just the story we

	getting' from ma that if somethin' should happen to his boys, there was three of us and he had already lost, we lost a twin set ahead of us and even I almost died. Now, here you go where it happened 1972 I believe in June, just a quarter mile my dad died in a car accident. He had left his sister house and we was having this big family thing, you know, in them days you'd go out and we had these – you know, when you go out and pick all day, labor, and you pick your peas. That's when you
25:55	get all the women, they would cook. So, now you got all this smell and all this good food and we just lil' kids and they would have us go in the back and we would play like lil' kids do and stuff like that. The men would be over here. So, back in them days the county we was in was dry. A dry county, which means no alcohol at all. So, you had people, mostly women had what they call a bootleg house and that is you go in the house you buy beer, it's like a bar but it's in somebody's house. They called it bootleg and you buy beer and watch sports, and whatever. So, all the men was goin' to go up and meet there which, I am thinkin' now, maybe four miles away. He went ahead and he got there and probably had a few drinks and they ain't showed up yet. So, now he's comin' back to meet but in the meantime he goes to his sister house. He see his sister there and they talkin' and he's happy and you know, he leaves out the house, I think me and you was talkin' about his
27:08	favorite song was Sly and the Family Stone, "Family Affair" and Dianna Ross, "Someday We'll All Be Together," Dianna Ross and the Supremes, you know, back in the day and he was playing that, snappin' his fingers, you know. And I just

	recently found these stories out some years ago talkin' to someone. 'Cause there was some older – he had older nephews and niece there seeing him. 'Cause I didn't know, I thought he was comin' straight from the bootleg house down to where we were at, his sister-in-law house, but he did go by his sister house and visit with them for a while. He left and they say he was snappin' his finger "Someday, we'll be together" with Dianna Ross, he got in his car and here's the fate part of it, the driveway is shorter than 25 yards. If he made a leftturn he's maybe three football fields away from pickin' his family up. It was in the evening time. If he made a right turn he was three football fields away and if he made a left turn, that's the long way around a dirt road. We believe that since he likes speed and it's got a lot of turns, mostly everybody – most people make the left turn and go the long way because you got the nice dirt road and you can drive and you can kick up some dirt and some rocks. So, instead of him making the right turn which would've been shorter and he'd a been right there at the house, he made the left
28:35	turn and went the long way. Now he's got to drive about a quarter mile, maybe even a half a mile and it's on top of a hill, you got this incline. Now, this is the story we don't know, some say he – he smoked cigarettes, some say he possibly could have dropped a cigarette and went to reach for it. Some say he possibly could have had a deer ran in front of him and naturally you don't want to hit a deer. That's really bad. I seen that with my own eyes. But either way, in them days, you know, you don't wear seatbelts. He was in a, I believe, a '67 Road Runner.

	Plymouth, I believe put it out and called it a Road Runner. It was a beast of a machine. He rolled over and he got ejected out of the car. He ended up laying on the side of the car and he broke his neck. There was a nurse that was behind him and she saw it and she was able to come out, and my mom, for years, still to this day probably has this spoon. She put this spoon in his mouth, I guess to keep him from swallowing his tongue. I don't know, but they put a spoon in his mouth. And my dad, he died right there. Now, the men finally, the rest of the men finally get
29:51	ready to come and go up to the bootleg house to meet. So, here they come on their way up the main road and look on top of here, you can look down and see all the lights and stuff. And my uncle, on my momma's side, uncle Bo said "Hey, that look like OC's Car." (30:10.6) Now, we back this story up a little bit. My dad had had plenty of accidents. There's some places in Alabama where he caused them to put up guardrails because he was known to drive fast and have blowouts and had rolled over cars before.
	SM: How old were you?
	Fred: I was, when this happened I was eight years old. Yeah.
	SM: Can you tell me what you said to your –
	Fred: We're getting ready to leave, naturally, this is (Inaudible) they would have funeral home directors and they would come there and pick you up on the spot. We didn't do no – he was dead. He would come and say, "You dead" and you dead. Pop had a problem with that too. Pop, my uncle here had a problem wit

31:35	that, you know, 'cause he might have been saved. A broken neck? People live with broken necks. But see in them days, again, you know, it is just like it is today. The dead pays too. So, they come to the house and said "Who is (Inaudible)? We need you to sit down." Everybody want to know why. Little kids in the back, we all playin' in the back and they say "We sorry to tell you but OC is dead." And that was like a wave went through the house. OC's dead. OC's dead. My aunt's house where we was at, she had 10 children, eight girls and two boys. The whole house probably had a total of 20 or 30 children in there with everybody. So, you hear this whole wave going through the house, "OC is dead" now you got all this cryin'. I mean, sobbing, the worst kind. You know, naturally we see our mom and mom is, okay, mom, I can't imagine where her mind was. Mom was taught not to work. You know, in them days women didn't work, baby. You stay home and took care of the children. So, mom didn't – I mean, here we go now. I can imagine the pressure she was under. So, we leaving out my aunt's house and I got her hand and I look up at my mom and I tell mom, "Don't worry about a thing. Everything gonna be alright, momma. It's gonna be alright." I don't know where that came from to this
32:45	day. I know it to end up where it is now, how everything is alright but – and she looked down at me, naturally, and she, the best she could say – I don't quite remember what her expression what she said, but I do remember telling her everything was going to be alright. We didn't know, man, we was just little kids. We didn't know the significance of have lost our dad. It was a big deal in them

	days. It's a big deal today. It's a little bit different now because dad's ain't at home no more but in them days, dad was at home. You know, they worked and they came home. So, it was a big deal and especially in the south in Alabama because everybody knew everybody. So, we as little kids, we didn't know. We was wondering why people was comin' up givin' us money. We thought that was a big deal. People comin' up and givin' us money, you know. Mom was trying to keep us
33:41	separate from all of the – what was going on, because in them days, again, they put a wreath over your door so everybody knew that somebody in that house had passed. But everybody knew everybody anyway and everybody knew OC. Everybody knew he was a tough man, he didn't complain and he didn't play. He was a brick mason. That was his living, he made – built houses. Most of the houses in the south, especially in Alabama was made out of bricks. Tornados, ya' know? So, that until we was in school, for me know 'cause I was the first, and I went through the school system which was a horrible experience for me and I was gettin' ready to go in the Navy too. I was going to get a GED and go in the Navy and get out of this thing 'cause that's what he did and he said, "Well, you can always go into the Navy. You can enlist out here. Come out here." Now here I am, I am about 105, 110 maybe, you know, I ain't never seen – I don't know nothin'. I
34:48	am a country boy. I was raised on a farm and moved to a little, bity city where it was a textile company but it still was country. So, my broke it down to me, said "Well, you're going out there with your uncle." So that also spread it through the

	neighborhood, "Fred is goin' to California." In the south coming to California is like another planet. We done heard so much the Golden Gate Bridge, I was just blown away when I found out it wasn't gold. I mean, our mind was totally that that bridge was made out of gold. I was blown away when my aunt brought me across the bay bridge and I looked across and said "Where's the Golden Gate Bridge at? I want to see it" and she said, "That's it" and I said, "That ain't gold." And it blew me away. So coming to California, people gave me a big send off. It was like I was getting ready to – you'd have thought I was gettin' ready to go to the moon or somethin' because it was a big deal for me, a country boy, we all country, gettin' ready to go to California. We heard – I mean, all we knew was stars. You hear me? All we knew was Hollywood. This is where all the stars go. **SM:** How old were you? **Fred:** I was 18 years old getting' ready to turn 19 and I am thinkin' "Oh, my goodness! I am going to Hollywood. I am going to California." It was so exciting. Everybody was so happy for me. You know, you watch (Inaudible 36:20.1) you done grown up over the years with, I may be getting too loud, but it excites me, and I am watching all the neighbors, how they (Inaudible) you're going, you're leaving. We don't have much. We poor. Live in a little housing complex. Mom
36:32	couldn't afford to take me. I had to go to Atlanta Airport which is about 100 miles from the house. In them days it was hard to have a car so we had to make arrangement for me to go. Now, granted, I still didn't believe I was goin' anywhere

	until momma done put the ticket in my hand. And then here we go again, I am thinking, "Oh, my goodness. I am scared to death. I never been on a plane before." I never really even thought about an airplane. You hear me? I am freaked out of my mind. But I knew it was also somethin' I had to do. So, Pop had sent for me, wanted me to come out here and we talked about it.
	SM: Why did you know it was something you had to do?
37:09	**Fred:** Because there was nothing there for me in Alabama, baby. It was all over for me. I had been accused of a drawing that I didn't commit. I didn't draw this drawing. You know, back in them days a little cartoon, with a big ol' head and small body that I had got accused by one of the teachers of doin' and in them days racism was hot. I mean, you just didn't cross the line.
	SM: What year was that?
	Fred: This is 1979, 1980, '82, '83 – '82 really when I left there. We're talkin' gettin' up in the '78s and '82s where it was, you just didn't – things was as they were in the people's eyes the way it was supposed to be. So, you had the black people here, the press. The white people here. That's another thing. I didn't know other races 'cause I only saw black and white. I didn't know what any other race was. I didn't have a clue what any other race was about. When I got to the airport I was lookin' at people. I was blown away. Eventually, story short, I end up comin' here.
38:15	Scared to death on the plane. Got here, saw Pop but before I left the house and, again, there was nothin' there for me, I didn't have no dreams of college because

39:55	the way the school system was set up, it wasn't set up for, especially black people, it wasn't set up for us to educate ourselves. It wasn't set up for us to try to prosper, it was set up to work in those textile mills they had making towels and bath cloths. That's what the money was in them days. You know, West Point (Inaudible), granted, it did help a lot of people. It helped a lot of people. A lot of people, they was able to buy them houses; people was able to drive them nice cars and if you wasn't lazy, you know, you had to work like a pig but you was able to have. And that was more for everybody in the high school days, and when I was comin' up we was trained to go and work there in the mills. They was just the way it was. So, but for me I knew it wasn't going to happen for me. So, when I left and it was toughest thing I had to do, really it was. I knew I was coming to – I can't even express the feeling, when you think, I am going to a whole – to me another world, another planet. It could've been another planet. That's where my head is. So, I got all these fears and I am lookin' back at my brother and my sister and how they are lookin' at me. I am lookin' at my ma. The family member around getting ready to send me off was one of the toughest things I had to do in my life. And mom, in her eyes, mother's, y'all gonna be mothers and we love you. We love all mother's, y'all. She said, "Fred, baby, you don't have to go. You don't have to go, Freddy." And I looked up at momma again, I said, "Momma, if I don't leave now, I'll never leave." I believe that to this day. I'd have stayed there and said, "No. I don't want to go" and went back in my momma's house. I would have been in my

	momma's house today. I believe that wholeheartedly. But just by me lookin' around at them, turnin' back and making that step. And I had to walk down this little, narrow sidewalk. You know, we got houses up here, and houses here and I walk down these little narrow sidewalk, and I got friends in between, and I got an auntie who live on the end of the project road before we get on the main street. And now I am getting into this little car and I am telling you, I am lookin' out the window and people are lookin' and waving. I mean, it is like I am being sent off to another – I am telling you, a new world. The feeling was good and sad at the same time because this all I knew. And I don't know what I am fixin' to go into because I don't really know my uncle at the time. He would come home and "Uncle Benny home." Oh, my goodness. Everybody wanted to see him because he was in
41:24	California. Hollywood, we were thinkin' he was in Hollywood. So, he comes in and he gives us five dollars and boy, in them days five dollars, oh, my goodness. Man, we could swim. That's what we did. That was the activity we were allowed to have was swimmin'. And we were great swimmers. We had Olympic swimmers there, I know we did. You know, the things that we did was incredible, especially the divers and flips. Oh, my goodness. Because that's all we had to do. Oh, my goodness. I tell my children this all the time. Lord, we just didn't have the video and the knowledge to let y'all see the things that we did on the diving board that would have blew you away. They do it in the Olympics. We was doing it and we didn't have the training. Imagine if we would have had the training. Imagine if we

	had of had the training. We had Olympic Gold Medal there in the swimmin' pool and, again, it was segregated. The black had to swim over here and the white had to swim over her, We did have, you know that's just the way it was and believe it or not it was okay. It was not out of the ordinary, people. It was just the way it was. Nobody hated that. Nobody said "Man, I can't go swim over here?" It was that way. It was just an understanding, a way that people believed it should be. Nobody had a problem with it, Coming here –
	SM: Yes, so what was it like when you came here?
42:45	**Fred:** The first thing I noticed about being her is it smelled horrible. I hated the smell here. I could believe it. When I came out that airport and I smelled "I oh, my goodness." When I got over here I couldn't believe. It couldn't believe it. It smelled so bad to me. In Alabama we got a million trees and the area is so, oh, my goodness. Me and my son just recently did (Inaudible 43:107) He noticed it right away, "Oh, my goodness, dad." He noticed even when we came back here the smell. That was the first thing and probably the biggest thing was the amount of people. The cars. I was frightened to death of cars. San Pablo, oh my goodness. I was walking across the street like a little child holding hands almost – looking both ways because I wasn't used to the amount of car. I wasn't used to the size of the street. I wasn't used to the amount of people that I saw. It was a total culture shock. I mean, scared to death. Now I am thinkin', here I am, I am by myself. I mean, I a wit my uncle but I don't know him. His daughter came to greet me, "Hi

	Sharon" but I don't know you. I didn't grow up 'round here.
43:58	**SM:** Where did you end up living?
	Fred: The first few nights I stayed with my uncle. Amazing too – this was another story of this was all meant to be. I am in that same house now, in that same exact room that I spend my first night in California. I am in that same room. I am also in that same exact room where he passed at to this day. I am in the exact same room. I would never forget it, he had... once I got over the shotgun everything wasn't what I thought it was and the bridge – the Golden Gate Bridge wasn't what I thought it was, we had – we went out. He picked me up and we went out and we
44:42	went to his house. And he lived out here in Richmond, lived up in the nicer area. He was married at this time with his 5th wife I believe it was and her name was Lanny. She was a sweetheart, but she didn't play and so he had a king size bed. I ain't never seen no king size bed before. When I saw that bed, you got to remember I am just a lil' 100 and what five, ten pound, when I saw that bed I said, "Oh, my goodness." I had never seen a bed that big before. They called it what a California King. Oh, my. I thought I was in heaven, to be quite honest. I thought I was in heaven. I was just sitting over there and I was like "Whoa" because we had been so used to having a little twin and sleeping one up here, and one down here, you know, sleeping in the same bed. I mean when I saw that bed – and so went to bed that night I hear over there fussin' "Get your cold feet off me." He was like, "Oh, Lanny, be quiet. Be quiet." So, I go to sleep up at the head of the bead here.

	When I get up the next morning, true story, I was at the foot. I don't know how I got there "How I got down here?" I actually had to wake up where I was at because I am hearing sounds that I am not used to hearing. And I did, it took me a second to realize where I was. So, Pop got up, we got up and brought me to work with him. He says "Boy, I want you to do this," and that was to clean appliances. That was the first thing I did when I got here. He had me start cleaning appliances.
46:33	So I did, and I was excited. I had really had two jobs really before I got here. I was a life guard at that same swimming pool eventually. And I worked at that West Point Peppermill for the textile company shipping stuff and then I had this. This was the other job I had. Around in this area then there was a nice food place next door and it was Golden something café I believe. It was nice. There was a lot more nice houses in the area – this big old giant sea (Inaudible 47:9.2) wasn't there. It was a warehouse there. We had a lady next door, her name was Mary. Bless her heart. She was a sweet lady. She was a white lady but she was so sweet. She loved us. She took us in and for our birthday, I am I still got them today, she gave us Jack Daniels. I got about 20, 30 bottles of Jack Daniel from way back in the early '80s they we just kept. She gave us every year. She was a sweet lady. I learned a lot from her too. Pop learned a lot from her and, you know, I got to say it and it's true,
47:42	if you tell somebody you gonna do something special to old people, make sure you do it. I took that for granted and she taught me that. I told her I was going to go over and see her one day, one Sunday I was going to come over. She was going to

	cook for me and everything. She waited good 'till I got – I came across the street to come over here. And she said "Freddy, don't you ever tell nobody that you're coming to their house if you don't show up." She was hurt behind it and I didn't know she would be that way. I didn't know. But when I saw this person it broke my heart. It changed our relationship. It didn't go bad but it did change our relationship and I got to see her before she passed. I helped her to the hospital. She was really sick that day. I help her down to the doctor's office and she went back that night and she didn't come outside. So, the lady across the street there, I
48:47	am trying to think of her name, had been in the neighborhood also for a long time, they were talking. See, I ain't heard from this women. So, Pop said "Mary, Mary!" she comes in the door. But her car was there. She had a 1969 Volkswagen. So, we decided we better call the police. We call and we was teasing at the same time, "Pop, you better, be right." Because they gonna tear up her house to get in there and if she come home she gonna have a fit on you Pop because she just didn't play like that. She would have got Pop for that too. "You don't let these people go in my house!" When they pulled it over, though, and went inside she was laying there in the bed and she had passed away. That broke all our heart and we stayed over here and watch when they carried her away. She had other family member we don't know. They didn't have a funeral or anything. Guess what out of that, though, the family had left that house over there to the church. Pop new a realtor over name Burt Realty. He was high up in the church over there and the church

50:27	didn't want the property at that time and he got first bit on it. So, he got that nice property over there back on that corner and the back lot for $67000 and that was in about '85, '86, I believe that's when he got that. We was like "Wow! Pop." So, that just kind of sealed the deal for this corner here because he had this and the other corner. The real estate started paying off for itself. And he knew real estate was, and still is if you can buy it at a good price. You know, it is basically self-sufficient if you get good tenants and that's where he really made his money at. He made money here but at the same time, it cost a lot here so he had a way out with real estate that when he had slow times here he has the real estate coming in every month. He had quite a bit of it. He was smart enough to, again, buy it when it was cheap. Another thing he was smart enough to do, he bought were didn't anybody else want to buy. So he buy all the places down in West Oakland, where all the drugs and everybody was shootin' up one another and killin' one another. He would go down there and buy it. When me and Ruth Ann got married, my wife, we got married and we moved into one of his place on 34 street, 1162 34Street. He paid about $34000 for it. The very first night, now my wife she went to the Saint Elizabeth Catholic School, she was a little bit more privileged that I was, a lot more, she had her father and momma at home and they believe in education so for her to go to this environment, true story, our very first night back off our honeymoon and we didn't go nowhere but LA and Tijuana; we had no money. We came back with $20. We had $20 to our name. And I told her – and we ate and we

51:55	spend that at Denny's, and I said "Baby this is our last $20. You better eat this. I don't know where we gonna eat again." We teased about that. We never had that problem but it was a good story. The very first night we moved into that house there were two guys runnin' at one another, shooting at one another. My wife freaked out. Right in the doorway. My wife freaked out. She was hysterical. I said, "No. Baby. We'll hang in here." 'Cause there was drugs on that corner, there was drugs on that corner. **SM:** And then this neighborhood? **Fred:** Oh my goodness. It was back in the freebasing days when it was cocaine mixed with baking soda and it freebase. Oh, my goodness. Drugs was everywhere. There's was a lot of drugs and a lot of people got hurt in there. But there was drugs everywhere. It was the '80s. There was a new type of drug that was coming out. It was getting so it was even more affordable. You know, we were so busy here. We were just busy. In them day's appliances, we were selling washers and dryers for $125, $100 and, again, we had appliances everywhere. We used to have appliances all out front. People remember us just by having 50, 60 appliances out
53:20	front every day that we brought in. All this space was taken up every day. We would pull those appliances out and line them up beside the wall every day. **SM:** Why can't you do that now? **Fred:** Now because the city tells me somebody is complaining in the area and we can't do that. And the area is changing. Pop said it was and it's changin' for the

54:16	better, and it really is. You can get service here now. Man, when I first got out here you call the police, you'd be waiting for days. They ain't comin'. Calling the police now, they'll be right here. So, some good came out of it but also, the way we run this business, it hurted us. Because now people don't really come in here now. The customer will come in and say "where are all the appliances at" and I said "Well, the city said I can't do it anymore." It's unfortunate that it's that way but they say that people are complaining in the area. Well, if you look at the area now when it was back when we had housing here and families, and things of that nature. Now we just have the younger people in the area and they are not family oriented. Some are but most of them not. So, in this area now, it's changing to where it need to look a certain way and appliances is an eyesore I been told. It's an eyesore? But it is and again, I think now that the area has changed and it's got a lot to do of the value of this property around here now. I really the believe the value of this property is going up. People and investors and people putting up all these multiplex units that you and I can't afford so they're changing the structure of this area and that's got a lot to do with it. You can't have no old appliances out on the street. We trying to put flowers and trees up and down the street, which I am all for. And I am being singled out too, I mean, 'cause you can go all over Oakland and you can see a lot different than what you see just here. But (55:48.3) this area has become a really big developed – a developers dream really. If you can get rid of a few of these old house around here. The city would love it. That's dollars for them.

55:51	**SM:** Have you been approached? **Fred:** Oh, sure I have. And we have people coming by taking pictures and people come by and give me ideas of what to do wit this place here. So, but we still in probate and a lot ain't on paper yet. So, for once I believe that everything is on paper and everybody see where everybody, *potheads*, then I think that's when we really get an approach and some really seriously people coming in and making us an offer. I don't want to see it. I want to keep this going because my uncle had enough faith in me to believe that I would do whatever I could to keep this door up. And I believe that. I believe also that my work ethic was just like his. I don't believe a man should sit at the house. A man should work. Any man out there now being sorry, "Get off your butt." I don't care if it is to go out and sweep the street up 'cause Pop, his work ethic was, and he got this from king here, Martin Luther King, "You know (Inaudible 57:08.3) we don't care if you have to go and shovel pig crap. Be good at it. Give it your best. You won't stay in the crap. Somebody will see
57:08	that." And because we had pigs and we used to hare that. Going in there with the pig and all the crap, I mean, kid, we hate that. We didn't understand that but I do now. So, now if I go in there (Inaudible) and I have and will do it; it don't bother me, now I go in there and I give it my best and that was one thing, Pop believed in that. We was talkin' bout why I believe – I been running this for two years now, I've been goin' for two years and a few months, and I didn't have a clue that he was going to leave me his business. He loved this business. This was his baby. I

58:30	love it. He really did. **SM:** What did he love so much about it? **Fred:** The independence. All his friends. It was a meeting ground. We would sit out there and we would have friend on top of friends and they would come here and they would be talkin' for hours 'cause Pop didn't let nobody come to his house. They didn't go to his house. Very few people went to his house. They didn't need to go 'cause they was here all day. People was here all day. Those were great days. You have people come in just to talk and a lot of them have gone on. Men and women, they gone on. There was a lot of companies, little places like this at the time. Walter Lee had a place down on 23rd and San Pablo. A guy named Cean, he had a place down on 23rd and San Pablo. Guy named George – there was a lot more places back then and business was good back then. Pop use to say there was enough business for everybody, still is to this day. But he believed in that work stuff and he worked really hard. And again, you have to understand where we came from. We came out of a cotton field. Can you imagine in the hot sun, in that humid sun. It's a monster. That's where we came out of. We came out of a cotton field, basically. We made our living picking cotton, and got ripped off on that because there was only one man in town, Lord know I wish I could remember his name. It might come to me – where you can go sell your cotton to and he had this thing, you picked it when the dew was on it, lomeddlin (Phonetics 59:49.2) that's lomeddlin right there. He would cut it with these big ol' hook knifes. So that mean

1:00:18	that the cotton at worth this much. And what did you do? You didn't have a choice. So, he ripped off, and come on, he made a fortune and real people are right and left for lomeddlin cotton 'cause you picked it when the dew was on and it made it heavy, paid it by the weight. So, for Pop to come, and he's worked that, he didn't want to – I mean, we rode on wagons. We had an old horse named Grey. Old Grey used to pull our wagon. Outhouse, sure you don't know what an outhouse is. We had outhouse. We didn't have a bathroom. We had a big tub with the boiling water, bath in tubs. We didn't have the privilege – but we still didn't want for anything and it was natural. We didn't want for nothing and that's how he grew up and he didn't want to go back to that life. He didn't want to go back to that life. Most people that was in the South, they left and went into the military. They didn't go back to that life. It was a horrible life. It was a great life, now granted. None of us would change where we grew up at because we could fish, we could hunt, we could do the things that boys and girls today would need to be able to do. We had family. Family was tight. We farmed. My cousins, we had these miles of watermelon in the field and we would go and just bam, knock a hole in em, eat and then just keep going. That was fun. Then we would sell the fruit. I don't know if people knows what picking okra. I know what picked okra is. It itches to death. We used to hate it. Picking okra peas, shucking corn, all this old stuff but it was good days and Pop had that work ethic so that's what he instilled in his business. That's why he was here every day. Man, this man was sick. His last here

1:02:11	this man was sick as a dog, heart barely beating. He was sitting here. Me and Pop talked all the time and I don't know why the Lord put it this way so it would happen but we work six days a week, we got to the point where Pop let us have every other Saturday off, and we ain't done this for years but we eventually got to that point. So, my thing was if I knew I had to take off during the week, and this could be leaned up to why he felt I cared about this business too, if I had to take off in the middle of the week, I wouldn't take my Saturday off. I would come in on my Saturday. So, one day my brother had to leave and it was my Saturday off and I had worked during the week, I told Pop "I'll just work." I needed to clean my garage, at this time I used to live in Series, down by Modesto. I was a commuter for years and it was great. When that Saturday came I went on and worked. He said I could take of next week some time. I said "Okay, good, Pop 'cause I can clean my garage out." So Tuesday came and he said, "Fred, why thought you was goin' to go and take off one day. You can take off tomorrow." Which would be that Wednesday. I said "Okay, Pop." So, we talked a little while that evening. I love it. Made my two hour commute home. Got up Wednesday and first time ever, I didn't think about talkin' to Pop that day. We talked all the time. We talked at the house. We talked here. We talked all the time. Loved talking to him 'cause we talked about old times at home. And I miss that, Pop. I did miss that dearly. We talked about old times. So, that day I didn't think about calling Pop. Did what I said. Did my garage and I am hearing everybody telling me he wasn't feeling good.

1:03:56	So Thursday I come to work, Leah our reception says "Have you heard from Pop?" I said "No, I ain't heard from Pop." Pop didn't like to be bothered. So, we didn't call him in the morning time. Then Pop would leave and go back to Alabama and didn't even tell anybody his was going till he got there. I understand now why he did that. That done happened to me now. I can't even tell nobody when I am coming home no more or it's another story. But so I didn't know. We didn't know. We said "We can't be messin' with Pop, yet, 'cause he'll call." If he wanted comin', he'd eventually call, lie and say "I'm on my way" and never show up. We got used to that. So I said "No, we aren't going to bother you yet." So, around 12 or something 12:00 o'clock or so, man, we hadn't heard from Pop yet. Leah said, "Y'all sure you don't want to call?" "No. We give him to 3:00. I'll call Sharon." She work at Kaiser in Berkeley, I call Sharon, left a message, tell her to check on Pop. She called me back and said "No. I ain't heard from Pop either." I said "Sharon, we got to check on Pop then. You go out to his house and check on him. Call me when you get there." She get off about 3:00 and get to his house about 3:00 o'clock. She called me, said "Fred, uh, both his cars here," I said, "Okay, Sharon. I am on my way." By that time she done call 911, paramedics. And ten minutes into my ride my phone go off again. It's Sharon and she says "Fred, he's here." And I say "He there?" She says "Yeah, but he gone." I said "He gone?" So, I go into a shock. "I am on my way. I will be there in a few minutes." Then she is in shock. We get out to the house and we go into the bedroom and behold, that was the most peaceful time I ever saw

1:05:39	him in his whole life. The time that I was with him, I was with him for 31 years and that was the most peaceful time. He was laying there in bed so calm and his phone was sitting there by him. He didn't look like, you know people say they have strokes and their face get all twisted up, none of that. He looked so peaceful laying there. It broke my heart, man it broke my heart. Today Pop, you're gone. But it was comfortable looking at him laying there so peaceful. All the people who came in and family member who saw him couldn't believe it. 'Cause he could be a hair raiser, and he was a tough man but he looked so peaceful. So, I tried to take a picture. It wouldn't take on my camera. I think I had a Samsung 2 at the time. It wasn't going to fail. It take a picture. Wouldn't take. That's when I went "It wasn't meant for me to take this picture. So I didn't take it. So it's burned in my mind how I see him. And nobody took one either. That's the only picture we don't have of Pop. For me to see how comfortable he was laying there. That's changed our lives
1:07:00	forever. That was the biggest second change of my life forever, because I miss him so much and I was privileged to have all those years with him and get back to the business. I said you night, I am day, you look at my complexion and look at your complexion, Pop. You night, I am day. So, when people start calling on the phone – I even had one of his wives start telling me her business, telling their business because she thought I was Pop. Because people said we talked alike, we sound alike. I had to stop, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute" this ain't Pop you telling all this to. This is Fred. "Fred! That's you?" Telling stories, getting

	wound up too, girl. Started telling some real stuff. This ain't Pops. And "Boy you sound just like your uncle." And I said, "That's what everybody say."
	SM: Why did he decide to give you this business?
	Fred: To be truthful, I don't know. I just truly believed that he believed that I would do everything in my power to keep the doors open. That's the only thing I can see. When I moved to Series, boy he was against that. Man, me and my wife, we was living on 34th and was having our four child and the place was too small and at that time the housing boom was getting it, and people was buying houses
1:08:30	and we tried, you know to get us a house. I had asked him to buy that house and he wouldn't see it to me and I thought the reason he didn't do it was because he loved control. And he did, he loved control. I thought that was a source of him having control over me. I am living in his place; he wouldn't let me pay him no rent; I tried, he wouldn't let me pay him no rent. But then again, I felt the control because he knew I had to be here. Even after our child, when we had our babies, you know parents get to go home – I didn't get to do that. I had to come back here. I saved maybe one day and then I had to come back to work. (Inaudible 1:9:44.7) back to work ethic where he believed man should work. "She can take care of that. You need to come to work." He said "Somebody got to come to work." So, I ended up having to come to work here and 'cause he would get kinda
1:09:44	mad too if you didn't come. He start depending on you and I start saying that what it was was Pop just believed that we made his life easier here, and we did, so

	naturally people making it easy for me, they want you here. So, I believe that when I moved to Modesto in Serie (?) there he didn't think I was going to be faithful as I was. But I was. I was here every day. I still kept my regular schedule. We did get to the arrangement where I didn't have to be here at 9:00 O'clock. We never did a time for me to be here, but I did everything I could to be here from 9 and 10 every day. My work ethic was, if I got here late, I work late, you see. Especially the daylight saving hour, I wouldn't just – if I get here a 10:00 I stay here whenever, we stay here all night. I would get home late, you know, 9, 10 – I have gotten home many nights at 11 o'clock at night and turn around and come back. And I think through all of this and seeing that – 'cause I told him, "I am just like you, Pop. I believe the same thing you believe in. I am just like you." But, again, there's something else he taught me too, you can talk that all day long but people, when they see, you know, when they actually can see it then that's, what's that saying?
1:11:04	Seeing is believing. And so he believed that and I think he knew that my work ethic around here. Because I was just like him, I fussed too. I fussed with the people around here. We get backed up, c'mon. And I would go to him and say "Hey, Pop, I am getting tired of this crap. You know we got to do something." For him to see that and that I was truly just like him and I was here every day. Now, when I get real sick I didn't try to come but sometimes I would come here sick too and he would let me go out there and lay down in the car. And through that, I believe he felt that I loved this place just like he did and he knew I would keep everything and

	I would do everything I could to keep these doors open because he truly did love this business.
	SM: Can we talk a little bit about what's been happening in the neighborhood with family's selling off property?
	Fred: The neighborhood now has truly changed tremendously. A lot of the older people, we stated earlier, a lot of the older people that was here when I was first got here, even years into that, they died. So, in the black culture – it's probably in
1:12:19	all but I know for sure in the black culture, if you have siblings you have, that old saying there's always going to be one bad apple in the bunch. Pop used to tell me this "You can raise 'em, but you don't know how they gonna turn out." So, in this area most the people – all the people who own them houses who paid $15,000 for 'em, and $20,000 for 'em, when they die, their siblings have 'em and then come the buying this out. So, when there was a lot of houses here – mainly black owned too, they gone. They sold. Siblings couldn't see eye to eye, they sold. So, now you got people from the area, that don't know anything about the community. All they lookin' at is a house and a good deal and want to be here. These are the people that are moving in now and it has changed. As a matter of fact, it has changed even the weather here. The wind don't even blow here no more the same since they put these big ol' buildings up. It's colder across the street over there, when it
1:13:35	used to be nice and warm over there. It's cold over there now. You know, I could talk and an echo would go all the way down the San Pablo now. So, what's going

1:15:09	to happen in this community now is that the people who did sell, the new people who are coming in, they don't know nothin' 'bout the community and the community now is changed to high rise buildings. And some of the places are $2000, $2,500, $3,000 a month. So, the people who are moving into these places, they're not thinking about family. Most of them are single. Most of them are high tech, you know, and the family origin in this neighborhood is gone. And if you want to think about the culture of black people that used to be here, that's gone altogether. I mean, even now I could sit out on the sidewalk now whereas before when I first got here there was nothing but black people. I mean all day long, black people, black people here, they're everywhere. Golden Gate School here, 80% of the people went to the Golden Gate School that was black. Nowadays I can sit out there and I may see one or two a day. That is a big change in the neighborhood. Pop got to see a little bit of that before he passed. He said it was going to happen. He said that it was going to come and try to get this place. He said it was going to come and try to go up in the neighborhood. They try to put these big ol' buildings up in the neighborhood and some people love 'em. Some people like them, say they're beautiful and some people say they an eye sore. Me, I don't know. My only part about it is they make it so out of reach that the average person can't afford to be there. If you're going to bring in places like this, make it so it's affordable. Don't say it's affordable. Make it where it is affordable. And this neighborhood is changing and I am believing in the next five years that not only there won't be no

	more blacks around here, not only won't be no more families around here, it will be totally just the 25 to 35 age group in this area altogether. Granted, they're going to be well educated, they'll have the best jobs but that will change the whole structure of what this community once was and it ain't no more. Some say it is for the greater good because it opened up other doors where you can get service now. That's what they say. We can get passed the amount of tax money they make.
	SM: What's going to happen for you here?
1:16:33	**Fred:** For me here? Well, this business is changing tremendously, changing every day. Not only appliances that we're buying in stores today are crap; they're not made to last any more. They make it where even refurbishing appliances cost more than you can sell them for. So, in this business here there's two things I'm going to have to do. I am going to have to go – and I am going to, I have already started, recycled. Recycling is the key. We recycle everything now. I recycle plastic, doors, cord, everything. That is the key for this appliance business because there are so many out there and they need to be recycled. Now, what's going to happen to me, eventually I am going to have to (Inaudible 1:17:24.1). We will sell new here now. And I will do new now, but I can't compare to the price. I can't save you anything. So, that's why I haven't went and just totally went over to new because I can't save you anything because they are not giving me a few dollars break. We sold new here for a while. We sold new for years but you only make $20, $30 out

1:18:35	of an appliance and you take all the risks. It wasn't worth it. So, for us here if they allow me to stay and I don't know if they can but I have heard eminent domain, eminent domain I been told is something I could be worried about. Because I been told that eminent domain is for the greater good. This store here, been here almost 50 years or older is not for the greater good. I mean we help families, people that can't afford – we're still doing that today. People that can't afford to go out and pay no $900 for no appliance that's going to last them three to four years. Well, we sell them here for $150, $200 and they work new and we stand by this stuff. And that one thing about Pop too, that I believe he left me his business, he believed and know that we stand behind our stuff. We ain't going to sell you nothing and we give a 90-day warrantee and it last you 91 days and we going to say you out of warrantee – we don't do that here. And Pop, he didn't play on that. We didn't have people come up here Pop selling drugs and everything. You'd be amazed how many people come walk through them doors. Pop didn't get into to that. Pop didn't believe in that stuff. He didn't believe in that. He always said there are more good money out here than bad money. He didn't go out there. He didn't have to look over his back. Pop said "I ain't never got to look over my shoulder. I ain't got to look over my shoulder for nobody." So we didn't sell no drugs here and he knew I ain't into that. He knew I won't do it either. He know I ain't into that and he know I ain't goin' to have it. I won't have it and he know that. That' why I

	told him – me and him, and we grow up in the same house, we grew up on the same place. He knew, we knew how we came up and I believe he knew my work ethic, it was his. I got it from him. Because now, granted, my dad, we didn't get to spend a lot of time with him – worked hard. Play on the weekend together. We didn't get to do a whole lot. We went to work with him a couple times. So, pop, my uncle is like our father, me and my brothers. He our father, really. Because I grew up in an abusive household. My mom knew her husband (1:20:16.6) but never got married but back in them days called it common law, 38 years. Yeah,
1:20:16	'bout 38 years they were together before my dad died, and he was an abusive man. He was an abusive man so we grew up in an abusive household but the principles was there and so we had to work and pop believed that. Now, another thing he did in his will, the way he set it up, he set it up so all us men had to work. I mean, he could've set it up so we didn't have to work at all. All of us could've been set up right now where we could've been just collecting money every month. Just wait and kick back doing whatever you want to do. It was easy for him to do that. He had enough to where he could've left it to the people he left in his will to where none of us ever had to work again. We could've travelled anywhere we wanted to. We could've done anything we wanted to do. But pop didn't set it up that way and I am grateful that he didn't because again what am I going to do? He had set it up like that, I mean, what am I gonna do? I got to work and everybody
1:21:25	know me on this 'cause if I don't move, I tell people "If I don't work, I am going to

	die." I am aching right now because I done had a lot of rest and stuff; I mean I can't stop moving. So, I am glad he did what he did. Now, of course his daughter, Sharon, now he left it so – now Sharon is a very accomplished person. She is a violinist. She play all over the world. She is a science tech for Kaiser and what she does is she looks at all disease and samples and tell you what you got. When you go, and everybody do their exams and she goin' to see what you got. That's her job. So, very smart individual. He did and her mom, Mary, we talked about her she was the one reason he got all this real estate, so naturally he left it all to her. So, her motto is stop working now. I have to work harder than ever. And she's right. She's got to work harder than ever now because people come up to us, all them wives he done married and they come. You know, here they come because pop was a liar. "Well, you did, pop. You lied a lot. You know it. Everybody knows you probably the biggest liar." So, he told people things just to get them off his back. So when he died, there they come. "Well, pop told me he was going to leave me this house. He said he was going to leave me that house." And I would say "Well, no. He just told you all that. No. y'all wasn't in his will." He set it up and they want to know who was in the will and I told them, ya' know, me and my brother and his four children. That's it. And he left everybody something but the men's
1:23:22	themselves, he left it so that we was going to have to work. He didn't leave it so that we wasn't goin' to work. Some people say "Well, I could rent this out and still not have to work" but he knew I wasn't gonna do that either. He knew wouldn't

	do that. He believed just like I believed. We used to tease here; we used to talk about this here. We would get into our big argument, and we'd blow up. We'd have some good arguments too, boy, over petty stuff and he'd tell me to go home. Pop would tell me to go home and I would say "Pop, you go home. You always the one talking about that you ain't got to be here. I got to be here. I got to be here, pop! You go home." He loved that. I know he loved that. He said "Go home," and I said "I can't go home." And he would get mad and start talking a mess "I'm gettin' tired of comin' down here just so y'all can have money. I am getting tired of comin' down here and y'all standin' around and ain't doin' nothin'. I am getting' tired. I ain't got to be down here every day." So, when we'd have a blow up, arguments, and he was throwing it in my face trying to make me go home, well that's when I'd put it back in his face and told him "You go home, pop. You tell us all the time you ain't got to be here. I got to be here, man." Then he'd back down "That's right. That's right." So, what we would get into it was complaints. Oh my goodness, he hadn't complaints. I hate 'em too. But it's a part of the business. You are going to
1:24:54	get complaints. You can't please everybody. But pop, boy, he would have a fit. So, I was the head refrigeration tech then and I fixed all the refrigerators and I took pride and still to this day take pride in my work. So, I would keep up with the complaints and here he'd (Inaudible 1:25:37.0) "We got 20 complaints" and am "But we ain't got no 20 complaints!" "We got 20 complaints! You ain't fixin this stuff right. You messed up!" And I just couldn't take that. Man, we would go at it.

	We would be back, and back, and back at it. **SM:** So, was he challenged by you because you guys were alike? **Fred:** I don't know if he was challenged or running game. You got to understand he believed in what he called reverse psychology. He believed in that. He loved it. So he'd get you stirred up, ya' know, so that you'd do better. **SM:** He knew how to push your buttons. **Fred:** He knew exactly how to push your button to get you to do better. So, I knew
1:26:12	the game. I knew what he was doin' but I just wasn't going to take it no more. I'd been for all these years putting up with this and I wasn't goin' to take it no more. "I ain't takin it no more, pop." He loved movies. Cagney was one of his greatest actors he loved. He loved Cagney. We talked about Cagney all the time. Humphrey Bogart. He loved Humphrey Bogart. We loved all the old westerns and we talked about all the old westerns, and Gary Cooper and all them actors back in his days and I still miss that too, pop. But I think just our relationship as a whole being that we spend so much time here together. You know, I am one of the very few people who could go out and sit in his van with him. We would sit up in that van, talk, and talk, and talk. Me and his daughter would talk about the – she didn't know some of the stories, ya' know, but all his women that he done had. You know, 'cause he'd have women fighting over one another and pouring hot water on one another. One story he was living upstairs over there and Lanny, the lady he was first with when I got her, one of his old girlfriends come in there and she poured hot water

1:27:20	on her and him and her was amazing. They used to fight. They used to fight, him and Lanny did. Lanny would fight him, really. One day they was across the street over there and had this big blowup and they was fighting and he would get her from behind and try to hold her, you know, so I walked by and I could hear telling Lanny, "Calm down, Lanny. Calm down." And when I walked by and looked, they stopped and looked at me. And we just looked at one another, right, and I kept on walking and they would go back at it again. I come back from the store, 'cause we got the little corner store, I come back and they would stop again and then they would start. They had a great relationship but it was a tough one. He said it was one of the toughest relationships he'd had out of all his marriages. He'd been married about six times now. Out of all them marriages that was one of the toughest one. **SM:** Can we talk a little bit about, just back to the present day of your business with all the changes in the neighborhood, how has that impacting your customer base? **Fred:** A lot. Believe it or not, one of the things we noticed immediately was nobody cold find us because we didn't advertise. We didn't advertise in years, 10 or 15 years. We used to do a little advertisement with the flea market and we'd hit the Yellow Pages. Just natural business stuff. But we had all them appliances out there. If you saw 20, 30 appliances out there every day and San Pablo is a busy street, that alone will let people know you here. Now I can't

1:28:06	put nothing out there without them tell me I am breaking the law. So, now people come and tell us, "Man, we thought y'all had clothes. I got a tree right out there. I done called them a hundred times "Y'all come trim the tree, man. Can't even see the shop." Especially you can see it now 'cause there ain't no leaves on it but when the leaves come you can't even see the place especially if you're headed south here you can't see the shop. So I call and tell them to come cut the trees and they tell me they ain't got no budget but right next door to that high-rise building there was a city truck there cutting the tree, trimming the tree. And I go up and tell them "Hey, man, can y'all come trim the tree and they say they can't come down to trim the tree 'cause it ain't on the schedule. But they trim that tree. You go on out there and look at it, look at it! It's trimmed. They keep it trimmed. They keep over there across the street trimmed. Captain Trench (1:30:10.4) own that. So, but right here, and I can't touch that tree now. I can't go out there and trim it. That's city
1:29:10	property. And right there it is growing up all over the place and nobody won't do nothin' about it. So, yes this neighborhood the change is effecting this business. Yes, our business is – we've seen a cut in customers. Yes, people driving down the street thinkin' we done closed now because they don't see all the appliances out there and even when, before pop died and I would put just a few out there, just on the front, and they became a blight, and an eyesore. You know, and I didn't put garbage out there. We put nice stuff out there for people to see, you know, so they could come here and see. That was an eyesore. So, with the change in the

	community as far as this business here, it also pushin' us out of business. The only thing that's holding us up is that we have been here for so long and the building is probably red and you still can kind of see it and we still have across the street over there where they ain't so far came at me. They did. We cleaned it off and it piled
1:31:22	right back up. People can see that. But we have people all in the neighborhood here who come and tell us that they're glad we're here. Because not only something else we provide that people don't think about, we provide safety. There's a lot of young people here. We used to have old people all the time walking down the street. Now, they have had a little break in over there and maybe one here but that's very rare.
	SM: So, how do you provide safety? What is it that you do?
	Fred: Because people see us here every day. They see young men here every day. So, the old people feel nice walking by here. They know we don't let nothing happen here. I mean, that's just the way it is. We have all type of people here. We have one lady, she missing a leg, she in a wheelchair. We got guys that go up, "Hey, ma'am..." we push her to the store. That may be why we are here now. We push her to the store. People know we here. People see us, the same face every day. That's something else that I thank God for, for pop, because that's something else he taught me. Again, we talked about that, when people see you, when
1:32:43	people can see you and they see the consistency of it, that will help any business because you've got a lot of fly by night deals and they're gone. But when you

1:33:33	consistently see the same people every day the same people, that's sort of keeping us here and word of mouth. We still try to give the best service we can. Word of mouth. Unfortunately, we gonna have to go back and advertise. I had not a clue. I told pop, I said "Man, pop. It sure was a lot easier when you was here." Because we could just get a paycheck and go home. Now I am paying all the bills, taxes and everything, insurance. Man, worker's comp insurance is a killer. You got to have it. So, the business side is a bit changed but we've been here for two years now, everything's good. The door is still open. We have good days and we have bad days just like any other business. But the doors are still open. The community, yes, it is changed. But as you noticed, you could sit out there with me and I speak to everybody. See that's part of community too. When people see you again, seeyou speak to them "How you doin?" You know, we got this new gym opening up. We got all these different people coming through the neighborhood now. I don't have the parking anymore like we used to have. We never had to worry about parking, now, oh my goodness, you got to worry about parking. You got two new café's in the area now. You have a different variety of people now that's coming in and people paying. Maybe that's what they want here. If they just leave us alone we'll still be able to provide good community service; people can come here all day long and see this place. This place has been here and I still don't know the age of it but I was told that this place was here when it was a dirt road out there. And I know for a fact that there used to be cattle 'cause there used to be

1:35:38	stalls all up in this place. So, I know this place has been here a long time and it used to be a hardware store before it became this appliance store. It was a hardware store. So, people know this. One man, his son came by who used to own the property and remembered when but and everybody's saying the same thing about this neighborhood is that it's pushing the poor out and the people that can pay, and that's what's happening. With that, you know, you have different ideas. And you don't have this sense of people that want to talk. People don't talk now. Most people in the building over there now, they ain't gonna talk to you. They in and out. So, the bond of the community is changing. Now, we have a few – there's some people in the community that are trying to keep it together. Laura Ingram is one of them. She's helpin', doin' a great thing around here. And without her and a lot of other people it probably would be just memories of what it used to be like because there is no way it's going back. It's not going back to that and I don't think they gonna ever let me put appliances on the street anymore. So, it is forcing us to have to go to – you know, I don't even have a web page, but you can find us on the web and I didn't do it. We didn't put us there, other people did. People go to Yelp all the time. You find everything on Yelp, good, bad and ugly about us. But, you know, there's two sides to every story. You have to look at that. And the other thing about it too, we been here a long time and I tell people and pop used to tell me too, you can't be black in business and beat people out their money; you ain't gonna last. So, that is a test of time for him being here as long as he has been here

	and still going. We don't beat people. You don't beat people and that will help your business. And man, he believed in that. I am telling you, he would get really upset about that. He was serious about these complaints. I knew he was. He didn't like complaint. He didn't like it. He believed that if you buy your stuff here, he wanted you to come back. Again, I think that's again why he left me his business. Some people say it was his only choice. You got a daughter here, Sharon. He had a son here but they didn't see eye to eye, and he got two children back in Alabama, and naturally they in Alabama they ain't gonna do it. His son hadn't been here in 20-something years and people just naturally eliminated it and said "Well, you was his only choice." And I don't know what that mean to me. That should mean nothing to me because I didn't believe or – I knew pop. And I told people, "Y'all didn't know pop. Pop could've left everything to charity." Didn't nobody know,
1:37:55	that's the type of man he was. 'Cause he wasn't going to tell nobody "Oh, I am going to leave you this, gonna leave you that." Oh no. No. He was not going to do that. Not at all. Because he wanted people, again, to cater to him. See, if everybody knew what they was gonna get, and I know for a fact now, if everybody knew what they was gonna get, they never would've spoke to him again. They'd of been very unhappy. So, he wasn't going to go out and tell everybody what he was going to do. So, I was shocked just like everybody else was, really. And I kept telling people "Y'all don't know pop, man." And I didn't know. I didn't know until I actually read through the will, well, his daughter told me. She's afraid you know,

	we got the business and the will and it was there. Until then I didn't know. I still didn't – I wouldn't take that for granted. You know, because I knew pop. Pop could've left it to everybody. Pop could've left it to everybody or he could've left it to nobody because pop was like the elephant that don't forget. Pop didn't forget and I think that's where a lot him and his son, why his son didn't get the business because somewhere I believe that he really hurt his dad and he never forgot. It's
1:39:15	unfortunate. His son did turn his life around. He doin' fine but pop just didn't see it that way and he just didn't give in to it. So, for that I am sad you know that it didn't work out for his son and he may not be happy as he thought he was going to be behind the death of his dad. But, again, that has nothing to do with me. And that's what I told everybody. It has nothing to do with me. I am grateful to God he did what he did, but I wasn't trying to persuade him "Oh, pop, leave me your business." There was one woman though, when I first got here, I used to have a big ol' afro and long hair and she called me black Jesus, she called me black Jesus. I had my hair down to here and when I came across the street, naturally, now I told you I was afraid to walk across San Pablo. They let me off across the street over
1:40:20	there and he introduced me to everybody and at that time probably had ten employees at that time, introduce me to everybody and he wanted to bring me across the street to meet Lorain, so she was our receptionist at the time. So, naturally, I walked and got in the crowd, scared to death. That still scare me today thinking about it. Walked across the street with everybody looking and paranoid

1:41:24	just looking. And Lorain saw me and she said "He the one, Ben." She said "He the one." I told her that too. I told her that. She said "He the one." And so, naturally, people took a look to that. I got beat up. I got beat up by one of the employees. He got jealous, beat me up. I was a country boy so I didn't know what to do. I didn't know nobody. I thought a whole lot of people were gonna beat me up because pop had started at that time – I think he might have played a little bit of favoritism toward me, you know. And I think the other employees that had been here a long time, they got jealous of that. **(Audio Ends)**

"ALL MY KINFOLKS ARE HERE. ALL MY KINFOLKS..."

–Philip Wilson

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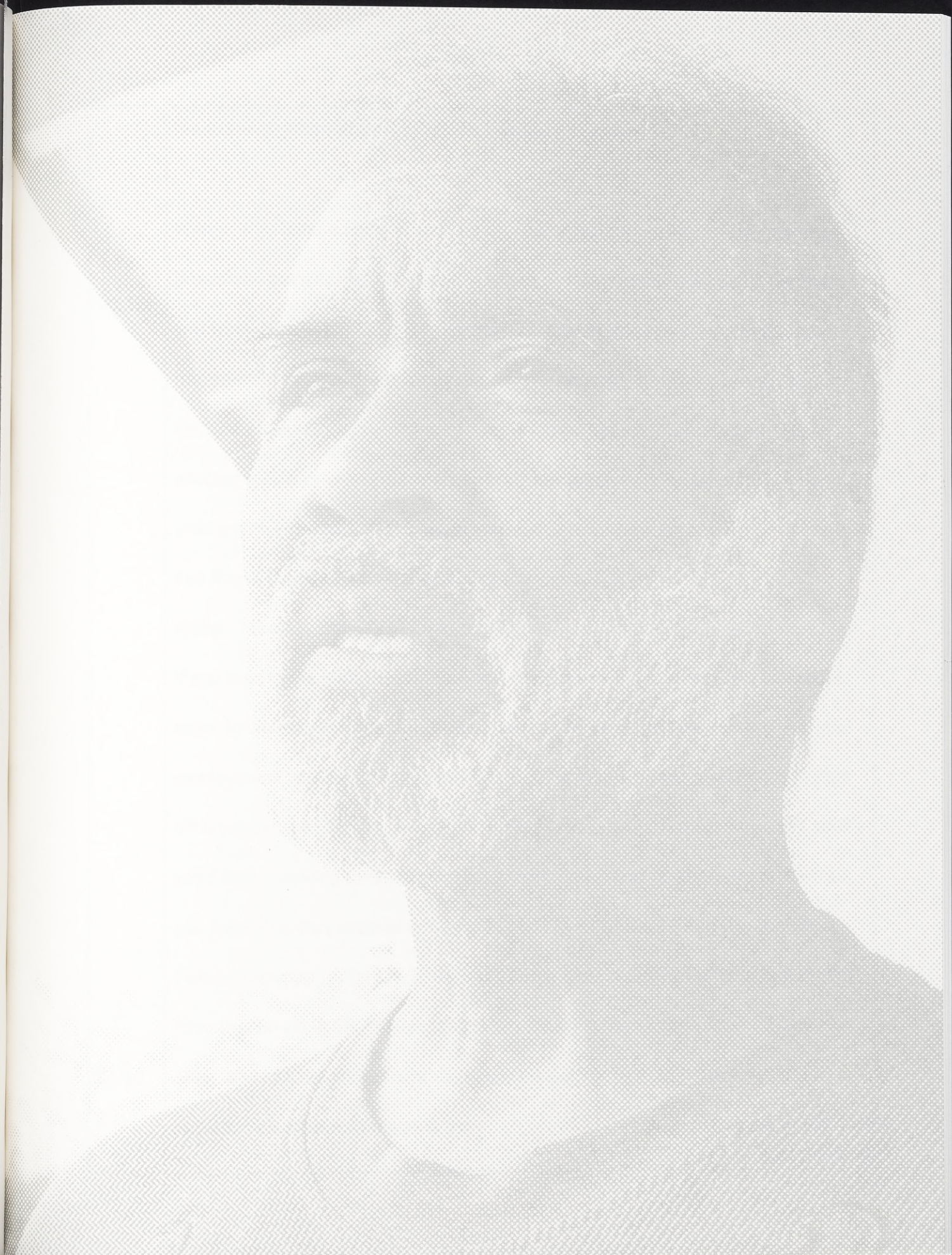


PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Philip Wilson, 2015

Photo by Sue Mark

	marksearch_Philip Wilson 1/21/2015 Video Transcript
00:12	**Philip:** My Name is Philip Wilson. Usually we change the name, we take the guilty (Inaudible) but since we are speaking (Inaudible). My mother was white, my father was black. That is my biological parents and I was adopted by some Creoles who moved from Louisiana to this state back in the late '40s. They adopted me and because all my other kinfolk were all goofy lookin' like me, I just thought I was another yellow n---- (Inaudible). Everybody was green eyes, brown skin and high yellow with kinky hair. You know, we were all screwed up. But anyway...
	Sue Mark: How did your family decide to move here?
	Philip: I think somebody had a foothold, I believed that this was the promised land if you lived in the bible thought during those times. Join the service and you could move to working in Shipyards in Richmond and Oakland and gets some very gainful employment. Although, we weren't very sure about black folks having guns to fight off Japanese and Germans, we didn't mind them working. They seem to all do pretty good with a welding torch, maybe not an AKA, if they had an AKA in them days but, you know, but they seemed to do pretty good. A lot of black folks from Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, there was a very large contingency of people that come from that brood In the Oakland area, Richmond, you know, this particular area.
01:50	**SM:** What do you know about the neighborhood? What was it like when your parents moved here, that was in the –

	Philip: The late '40s I'd think. Or early '50s I know, 'cause I was here in the early '50s and everything was up and running by the time I got here so I think my father exited the service. He was an enlisted man and ended up back here after the war. They done pretty good here. They came with a lot of kinfolk, as I told you. Just like I think Hispanic people are doing today in the fruit, well 50 years ago – I don't work for the census bureau, but 50 years ago the demographics of Oakland was far different. They were a great number of black people, very few whites, Asians. There was a Hispanic population but most of them residing in, we used to call it Jingo Town, which is the Fruitvale area other side of the freeway. (0:02:56.6) Since that time, a lot of baby making, a lot of changes has been made. A lot of stuff going on that has caused, you know, just the demographics have been on for some time.
02:56	**SM:** So, when you're family moved here, what was the neighborhood like? Was it diverse?
	Philip: All black. Obviously not some of my hair. The scars you see came from my life of pigmentation until I learned to run pretty fast and box fairly well. I got my butt whupped by everybody 'cause I couldn't escape: I was too dark for the white folks; I was too light for the black folks. I got my ass whupped by everybody here. But after they whupped my ass several times, they got tired of it. They kind of gave me a break. I was telling you a story about the terrorism on the corner. There was a white guy, the only two white guys that I can remember ever going to that school down the street, Golden Gate. It was Golden Gate then, now I don't know what it is.
03:45	

04:49	Now it's a private school. It was Golden Gate Elementary School; it went to 8th grade, I think it was, K-8. That recreation that they just tore down – I have seen these white boys fight, both of them could fight and in close, I knew I didn't want to squabble with these kids, right! But I whupped him playing basketball. Basketball was my passion in them days and I remember he took issue with that. Well, I guess he figured, he can't whup me on the basketball court then he'd just whup my ass and I wasn't for that either. But I didn't want to fight him in close so I started at that basketball course down there and I'd hit him and I would back up. I would kick him and I would back up. I'd hit 'em, I backed up all the way over around the corner and I got in front of – my house, the house I grew up in is directly, if you drove through my driveway to the next street, you'd end up two houses over from where I grew up at. So, I hit him, kicked him, backed up all the way around the corner and when I got there Jackie was there and Jackie was a tomboy in them days, this is when we was kids, ya know. And she slapped him and I guess her fingerprints must still be on the side of his head. But I didn't have to – 'cause I knew I was in trouble because I couldn't figure out how to get back up the steps anyway.(0:5:31.6). It was a whole lot different then. And then, you know, your perception and response to things at that age is different too. **SM:** What was different? **Philip:** Well, you know, just the demographics and I think a lot of resentments. I think back during the Vietnam era, Civil Rights era, I don't know which one you

	should call it. You know. Depending on what side of the fence and how you were
05:42	affected, you know, you might call it the Vietnam era. If you were here in Oakland, you'd probably call it the Civil Rights era. And to the '60s to maybe '62, I don't know when the Vietnam war started but from 60s, those were tumultuous times as far as there were domestic influence wars (Inaudible).
	All black folks had to do in that point and time is turn on the TV and they could see some of their kinfolks getting bitten by German shepherds and sprayed by water hoses, and heaven forbid we see the Willy lynching (Inaudible), well, you know. With your heritage you know about the genocide stuff, them hanging from an oak tree, and all that. But you didn't see that much on prime time, but we could imagine. There was a lot of stuff going on. Here in Oakland there was a particular phenomenon, right out of the area that you're interviewing about there is a
06:55	(Inaudible) senior citizen, you should be near Merritt College, now Merritt College (Inaudible) are on 36th Avenue so it used to be when Bobby Seale, and Huey Newton started the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense (Inaudible) King and 53rd Street. (7:26.5) Anyway, everybody was conflicted, as sweet as Americans are anyway, but you know, Martin Luther King who everybody loved, (Inaudible) passive resistance. We had Malcom X who didn't have the bible belt backing that Martin Luther King had but resonated with a lot of young folks saying that power comes out of a barrel of a gun and Huey and Bobby were preaching it from the rooftops and living it and marching in Sacramento with shot guns. A lot of stuff has happened right here in

08:04	this neighborhood because a lot of people died and were injured and are still injured, including you. I think the whole area was bombarded with drugs. I was just starting to experiment with elicit pharmaceuticals. I think that has been an impact on the community over the years. **SM:** Can we just back up a minute about the Black Panthers, 'cause I am really curious what you experienced in the neighborhood through the Black Panthers. **Philip:** I am a bad person to ask because I have always been a confirmed coward. I mean, I have friends who are pretty tough cookies, but for me, I have always been – I have always thought I would talk my way out of it, I will joke my way out of it, I will run. But, well, I love Bobby Seale. He would always scare the shit out of me; I don't know of a more delicate way to put that. I knew his wife. She's a widow now. But we tried to like each other a little bit in high school and she was just the sweetest – but I knew him. I would see him at the speakeasies because I decided that some of – just like the bible, ok? My father was a preacher.
09:19	My mother was a teacher. I should have been a doctor or lawyer, but some stuff I didn't grasp. Because I've been a hooker all my life, too, okay, be fruitful and multiply, I got all that but love my enemy, I don't even like my kids sometimes, you know what I am saying? Same thing with, I got the part about "white folks got our money" and there is sweat on our forefathers' brow and back pockets and it was our civil duty to liberate it. I like that. That was easy for me. Some of the other parts about helping the community and picking up a pistol and (Inaudible).

10:23	My cowardice, I think, has kept me alive and free. Most people don't appreciate cowardice as much as I do. I'll put it like that. It's been a very useful tool for somebody like me, okay? (0:10:44.7) When I saw that, I tell you a lot of people, Scooter passed away, I could tell you my – one of my daughters mothers, I have about seven different ones, I was a ho – seven kids by seven different women, I was a ho. One of my daughters, a passionate person, she passed away about three years ago. She and her daughter, they're very prominent local, political persons and I think she passed away because when Martin Luther King died, a lot of us who were riding the fence and wavering between the conflict of which way to go, I think that for us made us – it made a decision for us, you know. (Inaudible) Live the life of a revolutionary, status quo, that said we got to go out swinging because (Inaudible) that was a tumultuous – that was like a riot at our school the day that it happened. And I don't remember much what happened at my high school because I smoked a lot of weed in them days, you know what I am sayin? But I remember that like it was yesterday.
12:02	It was – I think it become a psychic exchange and a miracle. I think it was one event that gave us maybe the "fuck it" disposition that was needed to, you know, if we got to go let's go down swinging. I think that's the feng shui of its nature. Where was I? Anyway, this girl, my daughter's mother, I won't mention her name, but she was back to the (Inaudible). She was very courageous. She had more than I had and we were just starting to experiment with a lot of things: sex, drugs, criminal activity, or

	maybe revolutionary activity. I don't know, but I can say when your age changes, some of your descriptive adjectives changes.
13:20	Now I'd call it, I guess you'd call it work. Later I called it failure to comply with the law. The judge would probably call a lot of it private life but... you know, your disposition changes. Your way of perceiving things changes. But this person who I am speaking of was a (Inaudible) girl and she was determined to have all the creature comforts, all the status, not to be disrespected by anybody, white folks, black folks. Although I was a very mad person to be her enforcer because as I said, I've always been a coward. We (Inaudible) together. (0:14:22.2). Anyway, as a result of that, she met an early death. She died about three years ago. The reason why when she was at her funeral, when I spoke I said that there should be an honor guard here because even though I was a coward, she was (Inaudible) man. She was the first one who hit the beach and that's why she died early. And that's why many of us, I believe, I don't know if you saw the movie Black Panther, but I think it would serve this thing that you're doing to have those insights.
14:49	There was a movie written called The Black Panthers and one of their premises was that Oakland was inundated with drugs and I believe that to be true even though I didn't have that many insights at that point in time because I was just experimenting. I have been a patient, not a doctor. I have been a consumer, not a provider of certain pharmaceutical extractions for a long time and I struggle to this day. (Inaudible) right this second, but it's a real sick – anyway... got a hold on the

15:52	city. For me, that's another unique vantage point that it provides me with because it's – a lot of blue collar people are concerned with the right and the wrong of the thing not necessarily the legal or illegal of the thing. A lot of us don't get that shit. To this day, I think a lot of people reject and feel excluded and marginalized in the legal process. Just refuse to accept it. I guess maybe their ancestors were someone who (Inaudible) and maybe just jumped off the side and, you know, and for me, I am enough of a convoluted mutha fucker, pardon my language, I am glad my kinfolks were slaves. I be over there and some (Inaudible) using the ditch and momma would smack me on my bootie. That's how scary I am. But there are a lot of people who don't feel that way and resentment starts. Like the thing I told you about Dave, you know, the white guy in the band that we had (Inaudible) that kind of stuff, ya know? People – anyway … **SM:** Can I ask you, during that time that you're talking about in the '60s when the Black Panthers were here, what was going on for your parents? Did they stay in the neighborhood? **Philip:** It wasn't door to door combat. It wasn't a war zone in that respect. Just like with the movie with what happened about the police. The kids took the risks. My mom was a warrior like the young lady I was telling you about who I have a daughter by. My father, he's the one that rocks the boat. He was a Baptist minister; he did not believe in Malcom X fervently, see. (Inaudible) (0:17:51.5) "Boy, don't let me see you with no Malrus Beaks (Phonetics) You know, but the Muslims taught me how to

18:00	box and I was getting my ass kicked by everybody so I appreciated them, you know. I had to become (Inaudible), maybe out of necessity because I didn't have any brothers and sisters to take up for me. Or maybe because I was an only child, I became a chameleon, like everybody. Maybe I was a loner kid. I don't know. You got a psychiatrist you can bring with you; you don't need mats you need planters, mixed nuts anyways, but yeah... I have had – I didn't start paying taxes till later in life. I didn't start trying to be an upstanding citizen in the community until I believed I needed to do something drastically to turn my life around.
18:30	So, I am not your average, you're not getting your average Joe. When I did start working, I started working construction. I didn't know my ass from a shotgun but I knew I didn't want to have a certain title. I tried that first and it didn't work for me. Unless you have a (Inaudible (0:19:05.4) by the minute can't make it. I went to work – the Mexicans, too, at that time was getting a backlash about the Mexicans being here taking all the black folks jobs in construction, okay. So, we had that kind of gentrification, see what I'm saying? But for me, all the Mexicans I met, they taught me how to work and keep from hurting myself and I didn't know shit from shinola; you cannot shovel all day unless you know how to shovel. You see, come on anybody can ... No. If you're diggin' ditches all day you better know what the hell you're doing or you aren't going to be able to tie your shoes in the morning and you really don't even want to get lucky. I'll put it like that. Your back will be out of whack.

20:09	Hey, everything in California, this used to be Mexico. Everything, San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Los – you know. For me it was easy. I got something from everybody. I got something from white folks, black folks, 'cause everybody has done something. Man, I find that if I just be nice to folks, even when I was doing the wrong things, if I just try to be nice to folks, things work out a little better for me. I only want to shake off that bully (Inaudible). I hated bullies, so I never tried – and we as a nation in America, I believe we all are great pretenders: we pretend we give a damn. We give a lot of lip service to this and that, ecology or – we don't give a damn as long as we drivin', we don't give a shit about the ozone and that, we don't.
	SM: Let's talk a little bit about some of the big changes that you've seen in the neighborhood.
21:06	**Philip:** Well, it may just be technology, but police response time is one thing, on serious matters, I think they come a lot quicker. Just the services. I was talking to your friend Laurie the other day and I was watching some (Inaudible) off of my blind and I said "God damn it, Laurie, that's what happens when you white folks come here. There goes the damned neighborhood. You bring these fucking dogs (excuse my language), and there's dog shit everywhere. Can you guys just do away with the dogs, okay? Ya'll need to be doing this anyway, you know me." But anyway, dogs, more cars... because of the fact that you have a higher employment thing, everybody has got a car so there's less parking spots. Little shit. Different sensibilities. White folks are far less animated than we are. We joke and laugh. We

had to learn to do that I believe.

I have justifications for everything too, you may have noticed that. I think that my daughter who is the daughter of the one I told you about, was a Marine. She has insights financially, educationally, spiritually that I don't enjoy. I says to her one day, I says "Nanny, baby, how do you get – you don't get it from me and I don't think you

22:15 get it from your mother. I mean, how did you get to be spiritually mature?" And she says to me, "Pop, I looked at you and mom and I decided right then how not to live." But one of her most clever disguises is she has a sense of humor that would knock you out. Her most clever disguise is that humor and I can sometimes see through it. I am not known for my visceral or discernment but I can sometimes see through. That's her cleverest disguise, laughing it off. (0:23:13.8) I think that's what we do, us black folks maybe a lot of us are laughing to keep from crying. And not just black folks, I can't – you got a lot of people that are average here. I think that we've overcome them. I think that we all should recognize that that's what it's all about. Here in America, I mean –

SM: When did you start noticing the change, say, on your street in terms of who's living here?

23:37

Philip: Maybe 15-20 years ago. My next door neighbor is very conservative in her viewpoints. She is a registered nurse, retired. She is from Sweden. She has got some very different opinions from me. We've managed not to kill each other so far. But she's a sweetie pie in her own way, it is just not – we're too loud. I am too loud for

	everybody. But I like me. I got one fan, right here. Yeah, we're too loud; we're too animated I am sure for her. I got a big mouth. For me, I was sharing in one of my meetings in AA the other day, but I don't know that I will ever stop cussing because for me I got more defense mechanisms than the United States Armed Forces. One of my primary defenses as a coward is I talk a lot of shit. If you listen to me, and I might not be able to kick your ass but I will beat the shit out of your eardrums. You see what I am saying? You think that I can kick some ass. So, I don't know if I would ever be able to discard or upgrade, or rough them edges out, see? But, yeah, it's a lot of noise around here. I think the community is becoming more quiet.
25:08	A lot more dogs, but it's friendly and everybody is kind of – I was worried about the people right across the street over there. When he first got here, he was a little too proactive, you know. He thought he could call his homeowner association. I thought maybe somebody might, for lack of a better way to put it, tear a patch out of his ass for being a little too angelic, or whatever, you know? I think that if you're going to arrest black kids for being entrepreneurs and not accept any or some of the inequities at what they perceive to be and inequities about society, I think you should also arrest the Coca Cola company and its – before the food and drug administration was established everybody was addicted to coke. You know, I think that we as a nation have suffered this recreation society of ours. There is a very small difference between recreation and dedication. I think that we as a nation should realize that slavery and crime has been endemic to

	this society since the Mayflower. I think you can add to that list drug consumption and -- you know what I am saying? I think that before we give a damn about the ozone, or (Inaudible) or you know, we're kind of like, who said that, Cindy Lauper, not only the girls but the guys just want to have fun. And I think that's what we really need to realize regardless of race, color, creed, ethnicities, sexual persuasion,
27:14	everybody is just trying to eat every day and have their share of the fun, you know. I think around here, in this neighborhood, I think we're beginning to learn that.
	SM: So, how do you strike that balance, you know, as the neighborhood is changing to have good neighborly feelings?
	Philip: Well, I am just – I don't bring it home. I don't know if that's another
27:40	preacher's child, pitfall or whatever, I haven't been kind to my kids. I hear the bad dad year award every year. But publicly, I am a big (Inaudible) I show off folks. I like folks. I like to joke and laugh and for me, and then some of those things that used to be a problem, just because I am an old coot. My social calendar has diminished almost its ability as my hairline has receded and my waistline has expanded, you know what I am sayin? So, a lot of problems I used to have socially, I just don't have anymore. 'Cause here I have some work to do or something, I don't even have to go out of the house. You know? All this junk in here, I can play with this, you know. But everybody seems to get it now though, I think. I think of late, here on this block everybody is just trying to help more. I think people are wakin' up a little bit. I think that these kids are – if you look at that movement that I told you about on the paper

	about the police brutality movement, if you look at it on the TV, you'd see that many white folks in that movement as you do black folks.
	I think that it's important that we remember, man, just to everybody is just trying to eat every day. I think that maybe the people here, even though some of their expectations for the flatlands, I think once they've been here for a while, I think
29:33	these guys are gonna make it now.
	This guy across the street, I was really worried about him, like this can't work out, look at this guy. He ain't goin' to be able to cut it. Somebody is going to, you know. Anyway, but he's calmed down. He's cooled down--he's not quite as concerned about other folks' stuff. You know, what he eat ain't gonna make me go to the bathroom anyway. And that's the way everybody is so I think that everybody is just trying to eat every day regardless of where they at in life. I think folks around here realize that. And it's that adversity that really makes us in America, man. It ain't the thing that's going to destroy us. If we can get past ourselves, if we can get past our own bullshit I think we'll be okay. Here and everywhere, not just right here in this area that you folks are doing for your study but the whole world. We got to be more cognizant of what's happening in the world and how we are doing because we can't really fix other places problems.
30:39	**SM:** So, what would be a way to do that? For example, you know, like your story, Laurie's story, other people's stories on the street, where should these stories live? How should new people know about them? How should people be able to share

	them?
	Philip: Maybe through efforts like your own, interpretive dance, kids that are aware, grown folks typically don't have the time or the inclination, can you tear me away from Monday Night Football to come down to a meeting. You know what I am saying? I doubt it. I have a Raiders game I'm going to see, you know. But the kids basically, primarily I would focus. They are a lot more instinctively, you know, they're a lot sharper than we are. I think they've begun to see that and that too
31:33	black and too white is just becoming kind of grey in some ways. I think a lot of that is happening already. Education, stuff like that. You know. There could be something, you know, block parties. A lot of stuff like that, you know.
	SM: Do you remember block parties used to be here?
	Philip: We didn't have any block parties here but there was some places. Annually there was a block party on Derby Street, that's just three blocks past Ashby. I can give you Monty's number, even though there's a family feud and we don't talk as much as we used to, I am sure she'd be amenable. I don't know where's she's at. We haven't spoken in a long time. There was a big family feud.
	SM: What about other neighborhoods where people would come together?
	Philip: When you get to the center of Oakland, the people still come. They still use the field down there. That's a focal point, that recreation center that's torn down right now, but Herbert Laughton, talk to you about the (Inaudible) (0:32:46.0), he
32:46	has a bible study for men every Tuesday night. It's packed every Tuesday night.

33:26	Herb owns three houses on this block. There are a lot of people in this area who just create, proliferate good stuff. Al Banks, his daughter just started a TV role. He gives away food every Friday. As a matter of fact, I want to try to get some milk. But yeah, he's around the corner. Al Banks is an entrepreneur who's done well for himself and he's a family man. Don't take me as an a typical 62nd streeter, okay? There are some good people on this block, ain't just all crooks. Some people's they worked hard all their lives, you know? (3:33:31.9) (Inaudible) but my background is very sordid. **SM:** Tell me about the Dave's. You wanted to tell me about that situation. **Philip:** That's a reverse racism. **SM:** Give us some context. **Philip:** Well, in order to be some of the things that we as young black men think we should be because we have too much testosterone or too much television, or too much imagery shit to live up to – if you would have given me a Barbie doll instead of a pistol to play with I probably would've been better off, right? But these kids are very territorial anyway. And I can say maybe I am justifying bullshit or maybe I just have a better view from where I sit with what's going on. Some of these kids, a lot of them are incarcerated – should be put on the 4500 with the Coca Cola company. But of course, what's the difference? I don't know nobody who, in defense of those kids, and maybe they are indefensible because they broke my heart too. I don't know
34:44	nobody on 62nd Street that knows somebody who's got a fuckin boat or an airplane or got a casa in Peru. I don't know nobody who's got contacts in Afghanistan.

	I been a patient off and on for over 40 years. Seemed like by that time I would have encountered some big shot doctor who had, but I don't. I know a few, okay? Anyway, these kids, they would tell you protected their territory and it got to be not only for monetary purposes, but it got to be racial. What do we say, retaliatory? I guess members of the KKK could say "Those fucking n------s need to keep their ass in their place." I don't know. You can always find a bullshit justification. I always do, anyway. I don't know about the rest of them but I can always find some bullshit justification for my sick shit. That was a good call to Dave's over there. We practiced
36:00	right over across the street at Chuck's place. There were three Dave's. There was Carpenter Dave, and I am going to try to give you one of his songs before you leave here. There was Carpenter Dave, who was a carpenter; there was African Dave, who was not African, he was white as you, right, it didn't matter, but he was born and raised in Africa and his mother and father were African missionaries. He would cook peanut butter wings; he was more African than any African I ever met. He's been all over Africa. And there was also White Dave, who wasn't white, he was as black as that case there, but he was raised in Seattle and he was raised by white folks, and he sounded more white than anybody I ever met, but he was a good dude and a good bass player so we put up with him. Anyway, African Dave was a boon to this neighborhood.
	He was a graduate student, him and his girlfriend at UC Berkeley. In his spare time, he talked to kids, tutored them in math. God knows we need a lot of that. He did

	everything. He worked in the community garden; he just was a good dude. You name it, he was a sweet dude. Him and his girlfriend were riding back, and this is about 20 years ago, him and his girlfriend went riding back from UC Berkeley, I think, or somewhere out in Berkeley, and he came by the kids house and the kids, as I was telling you about, they were territorial, and the kids got after him. And Dave got away but his girlfriend was caught and he didn't want his girlfriend to be harmed, and now I understand that she's his wife, but that's another story. Dave went back to rescue his girlfriend and broke his nose, and as I say, more importantly they broke
37:56	his heart. They left after that. They went to Arizona. They graduated. But I think the community lost a good man. I think he'd of stayed a little longer, perhaps, if that didn't happen – the animosity, you know? Unwarranted, unjustified animosity. There's been a lot of that. It doesn't necessarily have to happen on a racial note. It could happen for some other bullshit, fucked up reason. You never know what somebody's going through. You never know what's in their closet. You never know what demons they squabbling with. You know? You never can tell what's going to happen. I don't know. I don't know what I can add. What else did I say I was going to tell you about?
38:41	**SM:** You said you had a song?
	Philip: Yeah, yeah. Carpenter Dave left me this song when he left. This is from the play I was telling you about. Crack Hit and the Guardian Angels. There are several songs. That's another thing. This neighborhood has always had music. Around three

	doors, you got Todd, you see a house that's raised up, you'll see a guy that's workin' on his house. You know Todd? All of them are musicians. They own their own chickens. Very creative young man. Across the street you got Barrel. Barrel plays everything you put in front of her. She plays the clarinet. She plays – and she's a writer. Anyways, she's gonna be one of the Guardian Angels, the primary Guardian Angel. Anyway, that's another story. Let me see. This song goes like this. Dave gave me this song.
39:40	♫ Went into town. I looked all around. Tried to find some shoes to fit these blues. Some were too long and some were too small, but with Jesus, one size fits all. Oh Oh Oh. One size fits all. ♫
	Anyway, we really liked that. I had another one for you, too. This is – I got to (Inaudible (0:40:12.9) This is called John the Baptist. It used to be Yipe Sista Pipe but the Guardian Angel told me to change the name to John the Baptist because God
40:18	want some more recognition. That's what God told her to tell me and if I didn't do it, I was going to get my contract eradicated.
	♫My name is John the Baptist, but I'm doing my part 'cause what I'm 'bout to tell you straight from the heart, I used to smoke cocaine but it got me beat 'cause everytime I smoke it I would get into heat, cuz. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I had to have a woman, had to tweak with her fleet. Now, yipes, it's the pipe. Won't somebody tell me how to get it out my life? Yipes, it's the pipe. I love it more than I love my kids and my wife. I told so many lies --♫

41:52	Anyway, the story is about sick people in a therapeutic setting at AA meetings, at NA meetings, at church, at bible studies, people whose grandmother's and grandfathers were murdered by the dozens in gas chambers in Germany, just getting together and trying to help each other. This one, the name of this one is – there's a lot of poems and a lot of rap, and a lot of songs that's played. I thought I was going to get a few in here, I was like, I don't know this white girl that good, I can't be – but I kinda like you; I think you're alright. I hope this works out okay for both of us. Anyway, the last one is about that. About one drunk, one sinner, (Inaudible) I know you guys got other things to do. ♫I used to think of angels with halos and with wings, but now I know they come to me as drunks and dope fiends. No more drunken stupors. End it dope fiend runs. I know it's true, the boys in blue are just angels with guns. ♫ (Inaudible) I don't know. That's all I can think of, you guys. I've been running my mouth for like – unless you got something else right down there that I didn't touch on, but I think I – **Matt Dibble (videographer):** Can I ask a question? This may not be in Sue's agenda, but when you answer, you can look at her, but I am just curious about the whole financial kind of forces that can change a neighborhood. So that when somebody's house suddenly could be sold for you know, $700,000 or whatever – **Philip:** And some people have asked me –
43:11	**Matt Dibble:** And maybe you've had conversations with other people, you know,

	that you've known for a long time.
	Philip: That's a good question. See there! You shoulda' let Matt asked the questions. He's there hiding behind the camera, see. But yeah that's a good question, man, because when you sell your house, when you sell your house you got to fix it up. If I tried to sell this house as it and you were too big a sucker to look downstairs and see all the work I need to do. See, you got to fix it up as the buyer. You got get the sewer lateral, you know, it's got to be ship shape when you get it. Whatever you want to do to it you got to get permits. You know, you can't just bring Jose in there and –
	SM: I think what Matt's talking about is that this neighborhood in the past five years has become really desirable.
44:05:	**Philip:** Yeah, they all want it because it's close to the BART, it's close to the -- (Inaudible) (0:44:17.8) across the street. You got Berkeley right around the corner. People come by here all the time, ask me do I want to sell this house. I ain't goin' nowhere, what? Can't get rid of me that easy.
	Matt Dibble: Could you talk about what holds a community together? So, why aren't you going somewhere? Like, why aren't you selling out?
44:35	**Philip:** I don't have a global view. All my kinfolks are here. All my kinfolks, and just like what I was telling you about Geotown (Phonetics 0:44:48.8), you know, you move and Jose got here. You know, this is the way he came. He came up, he talked to Consuela (Phonetics) and Consuela knew the way to San Jose so she, you know,

45:40	you follow me? You follow what I'm sayin'? So, she took this route, and when you get up here you can move close and see that apartment for a minute across the street, you know what I am saying? When my kinfolks came up here from Louisiana, they all bought around the corner. It's three houses. One right across the street from my mom and dad's house; it's owned by my father's branch of the family. Right next door, my mother's niece bought a house. See what I am saying? My uncle and auntie went, paid for the house. The rent it from my mother downstairs. We lived upstairs. I don't have a world-view, man. I don't know if I could get any farther than West Oakland. And, you know, I just don't want to go. If I – I may... I have learned this business the hard way. I thought my mother had the easy job and I had the hard job by painting and doing all this manual labor. My business acumen is shot to hell. Now, I may be able to turn some of this around because I've learned the hard. I've learned but hey, if I can't turn it around, make me an offer, Matt. **SM:** How many properties did your family – **Philip:** Three. My mother – maybe not my family. My mother was a shrewd ol' cotton picker. She was a hard one and she was a workaholic unlike me. She wasn't an alcoholic. She was a workaholic. Okay. There is a difference. She was addicted to upward mobility. One of the first women to go to Louisiana State University. She didn't graduate, but just so tenacious. And she got mad at dad because my father wouldn't commit, my mother wouldn't submit and she was about this tall, but she was a tough cookie. I know. I got the knots on my head to prove it, okay? But she

	was determined to, um "I can make it. I can overcome." She believed in that shit. And if I could've been – if I had not outgrown her whuppins, if sheer force of will could have got me to a higher place – and I like who I am, basically. You know what I am saying? I like who I am. I like what I am. Don't get me wrong. I think there's room
47:12	for improvement. I am sure everybody agrees. If my mom had had her way, and some other women in my life who had their way, I would have been far better off, you know. But I outgrew her. She was 5'2", you know what I'm sayin'? And in the 8th grade, the 9th grade I was 6 feet tall, so I could no longer – then I became rebellious. But yeah, she was wise. She bought this house. If I told you, you'd be pissed off. I mean really. She kept a little money. She worked at least one job all year round and then in the summertime she would work at the canary at night and she wouldn't
47:53	spend a dime of that money. She would buy a refrigerator or – but she'd put it in the bank. She was very frugal. You see, this is my fancy clothes. I am the same way. I don't buy no car on time (Inaudible) (0:48:21.0) put on these jeans, put them back in the washing machine and their clean; they might be holey, but you know. I picked up a lot of that, but you know. She bought this house because of tax repossession. There was a fire downstairs. She bought the house out there that I just sold for like pennies. There is a guy across the street that's a Viet Nam vet, he's got a huge house next to Troy's house, one, two, the fourth house down. You know, that house with all the trees around it? Bought for a dollar. A dollar. Anyway....
	SM: When was that?

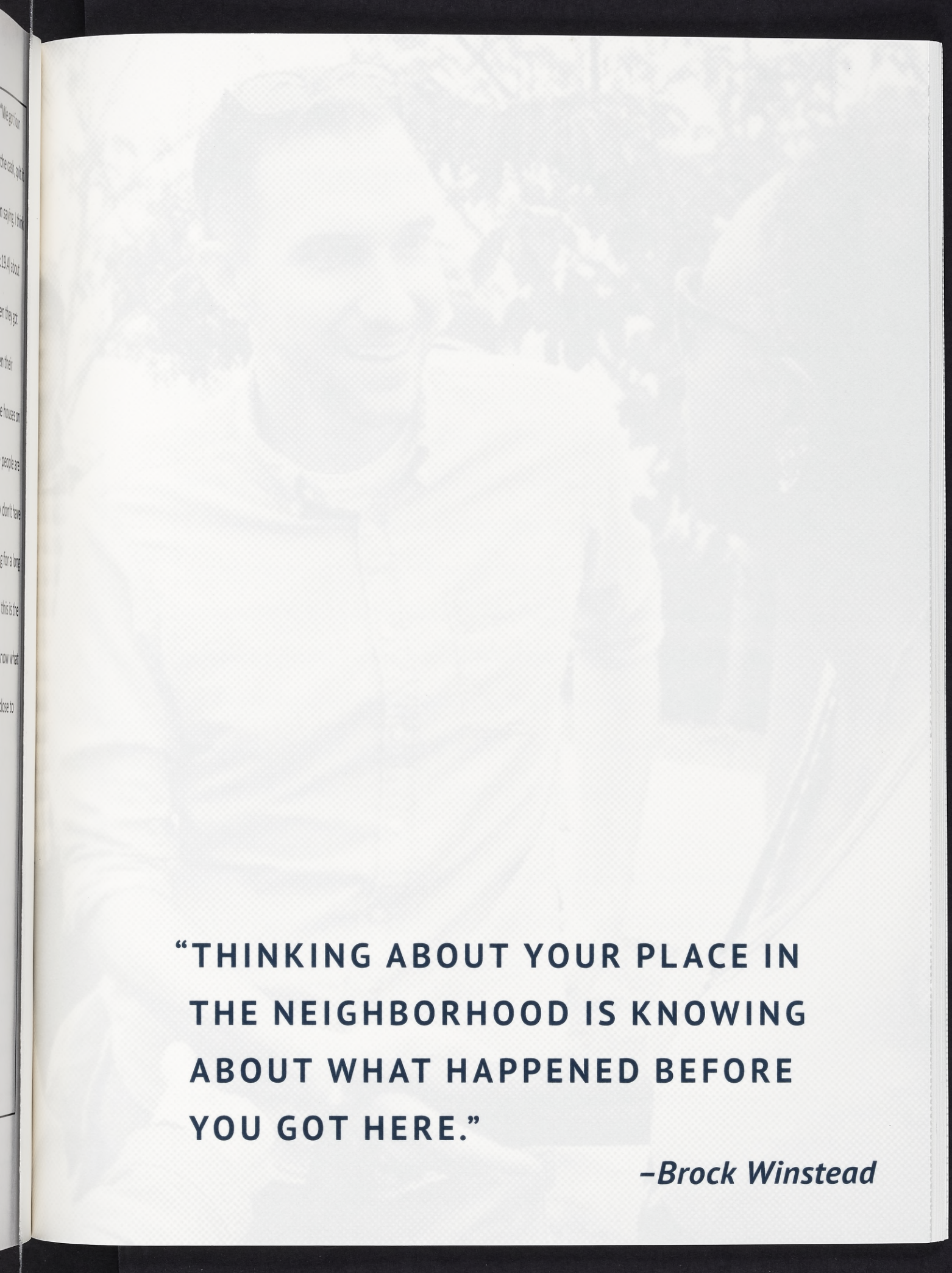
49:00	**Philip:** This was back right after the '60s, after Viet Nam. (Inaudible) I'm talkin' bout that dudes place they bought from me. Somebody offered as much as $600,000 for that house and they bought it for $16,000 then. And back in the '40s that was a nice piece of change. But this house, you didn't pay much for this house (Inaudible) and the house out there in (Inaudible) $7000. So, you know. Hey we got money back more than a thousand times. I am still struggling with my landlord inequities but I am good. I may get the hang of it or I'll sell it before – the Republicans get their hands (Inaudible) okay. **Matt Dibble:** Have you seen people leave the neighborhood who you always just thought would be here forever and ever? Do you feel like the fabric of the community has changed because of these – **Philip:** Well, I think most of the people are still here. I think a few, you know, but that's going to happen anywhere. I don't think that would be gentrification. I think there's people died, you know. This is the phenomenon that's happening here a lot: When my father died he told me "Boy, we got 220 acres in Western Louisiana,"
49:51	that's where he's from, twelve brothers and four sisters. And he knew there was going to be some stuff. Well, what are you going to do but make babies and…. Anyway, so he told me "Boy, don't you sale that land. Don't sale that land. God don't make it no more gooder. Okay!" Then he'd get excited. Anyway, he gave it to me so I did that. Me and one other cousin did that. We didn't – but after two generations, when he died he was 89. My mother was close to 100. After two

	generations it was 22 heirs, you see? Twelve brothers, four sisters. So, you got 220 acres and it was more than that. I can't remember. I forget how many. It was just too many people to argue. See what I'm saying? And I've seen it time and time again. It was a family feud right here and I am the only heir. But because I am such an irresponsible bastard, there was a family feud about they didn't have nobody else to give it to. But there's always a fight. There's something in our society – remember I told you that to me there is a conflict because our financial system and our spiritual system don't jive? Some ramification of that is, and this is just my goofy theories, some ramification of that is that when somebody dies, there's a feeding frenzy, "I want this" and "She should have that." In my family both sides, and both
51:55	of them are pretty good Christians until somebody lie and everybody goes bananas. So, if you got 22 people arguing, or 40 people, or three brothers and two sisters, see it's just gonna be some stuff. So, that's the phenomena that has happened, in answer to that question, to me. A lot of folks die, or a lot of people sell before they die. Had my mother known there was going to be as much stuff, I think she would've handled her business a little differently. The courts and the lawyers got most the money. I don't think my mother thought about things like that. The probate battle. I was telling you about the spin doctors. Probate – there are people who live very comfortable from that feud, that family feud that almost always happens when some people pass away and leave some property. If your name ain't on the deed and, you know, the state will get its due and my mommy didn't believe in that too
53:10	

54:20	good but she did things by the law. I don't think things would have happened that way had I been more responsible. Most of that I brought on myself. Secondly, you know, how you blame a guy for getting his chips and his money. But it's a whole lot of people in probate court. Court officials, lawyers do a lot of not so kosher stuff. **SM:** Well, you had told me the last time that we spoke, you had said that, you know, the earlier generation that came here to the promised land, they worked hard and then the next generation – can you tell me that in your own words? (0:54:20.8) **Philip:** That's basically what happened. If you've been choppin' cotton, pitchin' watermelons and workin' the field and subjugated, you come here and you've got this new found freedom, and you've got these new found opportunities for social, you know – my mom and dad, okay, look at this house. We've got dirty roofs and we got all this stuff filled in here. If you had seen the house that they lived in, man it was like, there was times I went to Louisiana and was like, you know, it was pretty rough as far as when they came up here and the conditions of living. So, we come here and we consider this the promised land and this is much of an improvement but once we get here, you get entitlements, the kids get entitlements and, you know, and I want this and I want that. And it is the American way, too. Just like that lawyer. He's entitled to get his money even though he don't see all the sweatin, and gruntin' my momma put into it. I mean, I got a lot of resentments during that time. I being a wrapped so tight kind of individual in the first place, I had a lot of struggle with that whole probate process. You know, a lot of people come here and then the

55:47	next generation, they don't have to work as hard for it. They didn't have to cross the border. They didn't have to work from dawn to dusk. They don't appreciate their blessings as much. And I believe this to be true, and maybe it won't happen, I don't have a crystal ball, I can't see what kind of things will happen in the future but there's a lot of Mexicans coming up. Hispanic people coming up. Just all the Chinese, Vietnamese, it's a very large Vietnamese and Chinese contingency especially in East Oakland and I believe that their next generation won't be quite as honorable. I think there's a lot – don't get me wrong. There's nowhere else in the world that I would live in the world than right here. Okay? And I could sell something and go somewhere else …
56:45	**SM:** But? **Philip:** The political climate, the political climate is, perhaps, better in Canada but the geographical, meteorological climate just doesn't work for me. And I just love it here. Maybe Canada, if I was gonna move, but it's too cold. You know what I'm saying? Maybe Peru, but it's too hot in a lot of ways. So, but people – I don't know of anything else. I don't have a global view. I want to stay right here. I know Oakland. I think I know Oakland. I think I can give an accounting of myself. I think I am aware of some parameters that vaguely define all kinds of people's lifestyles. If they have friends, they can get by here. So, I don't want to try nothing new at 63. I've been here all this time, you know. I did my traveling. You do that when you're a kid, man. But a lot of people move out of the area not because of gentrification or

57:53	so many good real estate offers, but this probate shit. It's too many "We got four sisters and two brothers and we gonna lose it all. Let's liquidate, get the cash, split it up and we can fight for something else next year." You know what I'm saying. I think that's a common phenomenon right now. Mrs. Ganz (Inaudible) (0:58:19.4) about the musicians. Mrs. Ganz owned that for years and her family. But when they got through they had to go their own ways. They had their own ideas. When their mother died, the kids just liquidated. You know? I don't know about the houses on the street but I think that may be the most common phenomena. White people are able to pay the market price. They are able to qualify for the loans if they don't have it all in cash, or whatever. So, that's a phenomenon that's been happening for a long time. That's what happens, you know. And they want down here because this is the gas crunch, man. (Inaudible) What are we going back to (Inaudible). You know what I am saying? A lot of people worry. So, this is right close to the Bay Bridge, close to the BART, you can go up a block and you got the best bus route.
59:02	**(Audio Ends)**



"THINKING ABOUT YOUR PLACE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS KNOWING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU GOT HERE."

–Brock Winstead

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–Brock Winstead

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE

Brock Winstead, 2015

Photo by Gene Anderson

	marksearch_Brock Winstead 11/29/14 V ideo Transcript
00:07	**Sue Mark:** Can you tell us your name? **Brock:** I am Brock Winstead and I have lived in the Golden Gate neighborhood for about eight years total. Three and a half years, give or take, in this house, four and half years a little bit north of here before that. **SM:** How did you come to this neighborhood? Why did you chose to live here? **Brock:** My wife and I, we weren't married at the time, but she is now my wife, we found a listing for a rental cottage right as we were about to finish graduate school and we knew we wanted to move out of our terrible student apartment and someone who had renovated a cottage on their lot sent us around to, maybe the sister was a graduate student and she sent her around with a notice that said "We are looking for grad students to live in our place, or recent grad students," because there is this perception that they'll be calmer,
01:12	quieter and cleaner than perhaps undergrads. We just fell in love with the place. We fell in love with this cottage that they recently lovingly renovated. **SM:** What attracted you to it? **Brock:** Great light, great little shared yard with the main house, the front house which is the people who own the place live in the front house. We didn't know a whole lot about the neighborhood. We have some friends who live just around the corner from where I am standing, from where we are right now and we'd been to their place a few times and knew this part of the neighborhood. That section a little further north, hadn't really spent a lot of
02:01	time there but really, we just loved this place that we saw this notice for. And we put in an

02:17	application to rent the place and then didn't hear for months and months and then finally heard and so we moved in in October 2006. We moved into this cottage at a time when it turned out, we couldn't have known this, things were going to start changing in the neighborhood. Actual Café and those spots, they weren't open yet and those larger apartment buildings in that area around Alcatraz hadn't come online yet. They weren't open yet. They were under construction. So we moved in before, I think, before this most recent wave of change in the neighborhood started. We didn't really realize, didn't think about it in that way when we were looking at the place. We just really liked the cottage; a funky old barn that they'd turned into a cottage and it was right for us so that is what got us
03:00	into the neighborhood; this place that was right for us to live more than anything about the neighborhood itself. **SM:** At the time when you were renting, how did you connect with other people in the neighborhood? **Brock:** We started with our neighbors which I think is probably pretty standard. On one side of us in the cottage there were, and still are, on one side of in the cottage was a couple who had lived in the neighborhood for a long time, a decade or more, but anyway they'd been here for a decade or more and were pretty plugged in to some of the neighborhood groups, had their ear to the ground, so to speak and we got to know them. They said oh, this is happening and that's happening, and so we got to know gradually some people a little further in field. We never, my wife and I never plugged in too directly with any of the neighborhood groups in terms of going to meetings. It just wasn't what – we didn't have an
04:03	appetite for it. It wasn't where we were pointed but we tried to pay attention to what was going on.

	SM: What were the things that they were telling you about that struck you?
04:15	**Brock:** Our neighbors talked to us some about the property crime concerns they had and some of the things they'd seen. There was a prostitution issue at the time in that section of the neighborhood around Alcatraz and that was a noticeable thing. You could sit, not long after Actual Café opened, you could sit in the front of the café and look out on San Pueblo and see women that seemed to hang out at a bus stop for a very, very, very long time over the course of several busses running through, and things like that. Then there were some more obvious and direct encounters with prostitution in the neighborhood like on the alleyway that our cottage opened onto. Our address is on Ocean Avenue, but the cottage opened on Peabody Lane, which you know. When we first moved in, our new neighbors,
05:13	the couple on the side of us said "Oh, we're very happy that someone is going to be parked back here, someone else is going to be parked back here now because it makes it harder for people to park back here and" I forgot how she phrased it. "It makes it harder for someone to park back here and engage in business." And we went, "What now?" and gradually teased out what she meant. So, the point is, our new neighbors, their experience of the neighborhood had been colored by, again, some of the property crime issues and this obvious, seemed to us pretty obvious, prostitution and, you know, so we were aware of that and we saw it but it didn't feel then, and doesn't feel now like an unsafe place to be. That was just something that happened in the neighborhood. That's changed a little I think. Well, let me back that up. Within a couple of years of us living there, I think there had been enough neighborhood activity and there'd been enough neighborhood watch kind of stuff that some of those issues died down a little bit. Now, I think with a lot of things with
06:33	prostitution and with property crime, sometimes it just moves around or becomes less

	obvious and that may be what happened in our neighborhood in the first few years that we were living here. But our introduction to the neighborhood was essentially "Oh, here are these things that are wrong with it," and again, it wasn't like it really turned us off to the place or really made us that concerned. It was just that's a conversation that people are plugged into and having. That's the tone of the neighborhood, or some part of the tone of the neighborhood.
	SM: How did you come to where you are now?
	Brock: After we'd been renting for maybe three and a half or four years, Heather and I had gotten to the point in our lives where we thought, "Well, alright, we are ready to do the next thing," and we didn't know exactly what that would be. We were ready to upgrade our
07:38	living quarters and we looked at other places to rent but it happened that we started looking right around the time that the bottom fell out of the real estate market. The crash happened and what had seemed ridiculously out of reach houses in the area, suddenly became closer to and within our reach.
	SM: And you say area, which area do you mean?
	Brock: In the Golden Gate neighborhood. When we started looking for a new place to live, even before we'd really committed to buying a house, we didn't really want to leave the neighborhood. We'd been here, like I said, four years by then and the neighborhood had changed in our opinion for the better in a lot of ways and it really felt like home. We almost, we barely looked anywhere other than the Golden Gate neighborhood and when we did mentally commit to buying we almost looked at houses exclusively within the Golden Gate neighborhood. There were a few places a little further afield but we almost exclusively
08:51	looked at houses in Golden Gate. That was around sort of late 2010 that we kind of got

	serious about that. And, again, by then the crash had happened and we weren't trying to time the real estate market or anything like that, it just happened that through, essentially through the collective suffering of lots of people around us, we were suddenly able to afford to buy a house, where before we never thought we would be.
	Heather and I both moved to California from other states with much lower costs of living, lower costs of housing and when we got here, both in 2004, we looked around and thought "Well, this is insane. We'll never buy a house here." And had essentially just written that off. Bubbles pop and that's what happened, and here we are now. So, we bought this house in March of 2011 and have been quite happy here ever since. It's been a good home for us
09:45	and the neighborhood itself really felt like home and still does. I think it's still changing in my opinion, for the better, in a lot of ways.
	SM: What makes the neighborhood feel like home for you?
	Brock: Part of that is familiarity, right? Anyplace can feel like home or feel closer to feeling like home if you're there a long time and you just come to know it. But it has more than just proximity and familiarity. This neighborhood has a lot of things that we enjoy. A couple of café's and bars that have opened over the past few years. It is nice to have a place where you can go have a beer or have a cup of coffee. I work from home a lot and having a place where I can go get some work done that is not my living room or my kitchen is really helpful for me. It also has been really, those really have turned into gathering spots for people in the neighborhood. There's also – it's a really quiet neighborhood. There is crime like there is crime anywhere in Oakland but mostly it's a neighborhood of blocks and houses and
11:12	neighbors. I know the people who live on either side of me and around the block and they're all wonderful people and we look out for one another and it feels, it has always felt

	welcome in our previous place and here; it has always felt like a welcoming place.
	SM: How did you get to know your neighbors?
	Brock: Heather and I spend a fair bit of time in the garden in our yard. She is much more of a gardener than I am, but I am happy to dig holes and move things where and when told. So, we're outside a lot and you just see people coming and going so we'd see people across the fence and say hello. I think Heather, in particular, has met a lot of people in the front yard. She's spent more time up there working than I have. And people just walk by and if they see you working, if they see you digging a hole to put something in the ground a lot of times they'll speak and they'll say something about what you've done. I can't take credit for
12:13	that other than digging holes, but that really I think has pulled us literally outside of our house and given us a lot of occasions for sort of casual interactions. And you know, we are coming and going all the time in and out, and our neighbors are – we don't have these aligned schedules where everybody goes to work at the same time or everybody comes home at the same time where you just go from car to house. Everybody around here seems to have kind of different schedules of work or whatever and there's a lot of kind of crossing of paths during the day. Which is also nice to have people around at different times just to keep an eye on things.
	SM: Do you want to talk a little bit about some of the more traumatic changes in the neighborhood, like NOBE for example. Can you talk about what was going on for you when that came up?
	Matt: Can we wait? That's a pretty loud one.
	SM: Yeah.
13:23	**Brock:** Heather and I moved into the neighborhood in 2006, like I said, in a time before or

	maybe right on the leading edge of when things were really starting to change in this part of North Oakland. It was not Rockridge; it was not Temescal. It hadn't seen the influx of wealthier families and businesses serving wealthier people that those neighborhoods had. When we got here, not long after we got here, here comes Actual Café and Tribu and what is now Farley's on 65th, and soon after there was the cupcake store and then the knitting store, and something about the combination of coffee and cupcakes and knitting seems very late 2000 hipster combination and it was clear that that was what the neighborhood was becoming. Non-exclusively, but it was becoming a place where the people who went to cafés and knitting shops and ate cupcakes were living. And, again, we looked at these
14:48	changes as mostly positive. It was nice to have a place to – the knitting store is not that attractive to me but it was nice to have a café to go to and things like that. Once the crash happened, it became clear pretty quickly that a lot of people were seeing the neighborhood as a real estate opportunity and we were watching foreclosures flip over and houses have that kind of quick renovation and resale that has become the hallmark of some of the changes around here over the past four or five years.
	We knew that that brought with it some costs. There were people who had been living in those houses who weren't anymore or they had been rentals and now they were off the market and the people moving in were different from the people who had lived there before. When it came time for us to look for a house, like I said, we were looking in this neighborhood because it felt like home; it was home. When we bought, in 2011, that turns out to have been about the bottom of the market. And, again, we weren't trying to time that. It was just blind luck. Everything – we can't take credit for anything that we've done. It
16:05	is just the bubble popped and then we happened to be ready to buy at a time that ended up

	being roughly the bottom of the market. We didn't look at our house as an investment. It's tempting to do that in the Bay Area because so much money goes into and can come out of
16:25	real estate. But, again, we both moved here from places with much lower housing costs and much lower costs of living, much lower housing value increases over time where a house is not really an investment, it is a thing that you live in.
	So, we looked at it as a place where we were going to live. But not long after we moved in here in 2011 we – after we moved in here in 2011 we were keeping an eye on what other houses in the area were doing and watching those prices, those sale prices continue to increase at a pace that was kind of shocking and still is shocking. We've never gone and tried to have our house appraised because we are not turning around and selling it. We live
17:26	here and we're very happy here. We aren't going anywhere. It was clear that our property value was increasing and at least on paper, along with the neighborhood. And the people who were buying those houses and still are looked a whole lot more like us than they look like our neighbors who have lived here for decades or for a longer time than we had and they were more the coffee, cupcake, knitting people. We knew that we were a part of this wave of change in the neighborhood that gets called gentrification which is maybe not a great word but this thing that was happening where the neighborhood was becoming younger, whiter, and wealthier on average than it had been. And again, that had costs that there were people who were living here who aren't anymore and that it's becoming less and less affordable because along with houses selling at higher and higher prices, rents were going up too and we knew that.
18:35	We still live on a block where there is still a good bit of rental housing and a good bit of economic and other kinds of diversity. I don't know how much longer that will last. I don't
18:45	

	know how long until the people who own these rental houses up and down here either decide to sell, increase the rent in a way it prices people out that are here now, or whatever the next change is.
	SM: What about your reaction to that new name?
	Brock: We bought our house in 2011 and not long after we started seeing videos and mentions on the web and things on the neighborhood email lists, and things like that about this rebranding of the neighborhood, or maybe the greater Area as NOBE, North Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville and when we had been renting closer to the border of both Emeryville and Berkeley I could, from our old place, throw a rock and hit Emeryville and with a good slingshot I could've hit Berkeley. I always used to call that the disputed border territories and I thought it needed some kind of title – we thought our corner needed some kind of name. Some people thought Oakleyville. Just to acknowledge how it was just kind of mashed together there. But I knew that the neighborhood was called Golden Gate and there are kind of sub-neighborhoods within that. But this was called Golden Gate and there
20:18	were signs up that told me that if I hadn't known that already. And there is the library, the Golden Gate Branch Library right down the street from me. So, here comes this rebranding that was obviously meant to make the neighborhood feel both new and safe.
	SM: What do you mean that it was to make the neighborhood feel new?
	Brock: So, when you rename something you are trying to divorce it from any connotations that its old name had. When Phillip Morris, the cigarette company renamed itself Altria, they weren't doing that because somebody walked in the door and said, "You know what? It's time to shake things up. We want a little fresh air in here." They were doing that to divorce themselves from the connotations of Phillip Morris, decades of tobacco products.
21:06	

	When you rename a neighborhood, and it was very clear that the renaming of this neighborhood was generated by people in real estate who were attempting to market it as a place for people like me, but for people like me who were not already familiar with the neighborhood, who were maybe coming from San Francisco or maybe somewhere else and who needed to be convinced that it was safe, that it could be home or that it could be a good place for investment. All of those things. And it frustrated me that there was this obvious papering over of fairly long history. I didn't know that much about the details of the history of this place but I knew it had one because it's a place. But no one had – no one was acknowledging the history of the neighborhood in this sort of new marketing effort. In fact, there was this video that was produced by one local real estate agent, really pushing the NOBE brand, interviewing people who were running some of the newer businesses in the area and people who were running some of the businesses and interviewing residents all of whom were like me, fairly new residents to the neighborhood. Really pretending, it seemed,
22:33	pretending like the neighborhood had just kind of started to exist around here in 2006, had appeared out of nowhere, had been a blank spot on the map. And it happened and I knew that it happened, obviously it happened – you don't suddenly create a neighborhood out of nothing in North Oakland, maybe Greenfield Suburban Development, sure, but not here. So, it bothered me. It bothered a lot of people in the neighborhood maybe for different reasons but it bothered a lot of people in the neighborhood that there was this ahistorical rebranding of the neighborhood that ignored all the people who were already living here who had not just moved here recently. And I say that as someone who had moved here pretty recently – 2006 is pretty recent. Some people took even more offense to the video than I did. I just
23:33	

	thought it felt kind of gross, and weird, and history denying. But it became this symbol of, for some people, it became this symbol of all of the changes that were happening in the neighborhood and all of the negative effects of those changes in terms of displacements
23:57	and that ignorance of history having a cost, a real human cost. So, I was aware of the NOBE branding because it generated this tiny firestorm of controversy. In terms of global import, pretty big in the neighborhood. I didn't go and plug into any community meetings and have in-person shouting matches or otherwise about that. That's just not something I have an appetite for. I spent six years working for an elected official and going to all kinds of public meetings and events for my job and had very little appetite for doing that in my personal life when I came home. But it was clear in the neighborhood (Inaudible) and other websites that this was a major bone of contention and prompted these much wider conversation about what the heck is happening in our neighborhood and who are we, what is this place, who does it belong to, who has the right to live here. It triggered or became a focus of all
24:48	these larger questions about, again, the G- word, gentrification. Probably that word, probably an imprecise word but that's the word we use. **SM:** What do you feel like your responses – how did you manifest your sense of frustration with the naming and all that trickled down? **Brock:** There were a couple things happening – there were a lot of things happening, swirling around that NOBE rebranding video. One, again, the video and the rebranding, that all left me with a bad taste in my mouth and I felt like I was closer to the anti-gentrification folks in the area who were making even louder noises than I was about it. But at the same time, I knew that I was part of this group of newer residents that were not by everybody, but by some being painted as being kind of the villain in this. I didn't sit around stewing like,
25:50	

26:09	I am going to have my revenge on them for making me feel uncomfortable about myself. I feel pretty uncomfortable about myself all the time; no one has to say anything to me or about me to make that happen. But I did feel very conflicted about what is my role in this neighborhood. What am I doing just by being here? I knew that my being in this, my having purchased this house meant that some who had been, by the way, I am assuming you are going to be able to edit this after because I keep restarting. Okay. I knew that my being in this house meant that it was not a more affordable rental house, which it had been before. I know who lived in this house before we did. We actually used to get their mail for a little while, and I looked up who that was and I knew, okay, well that is more, the people who lived in this house before I did were more like the older residents in the neighborhood than I am. So, I was conflicted about what my own role in the neighborhood was as someone who just by my very presence was changing the neighborhood, displacing somebody, even though I felt like I agreed on a high level with the people who were saying gentrification is
27:29	bad, displacement is bad; we need to preserve affordability in the neighborhood. Yes. I agree with all that. The NOBE video seemed to deny the history of this neighborhood, that there was a history of this neighborhood before about 2006 or maybe a little earlier. But there were people who were more vocal on the anti-gentrification side who were using the phrase "historic residents" things like that to talk about people who had lived here for several decades and I knew what they meant but that also seemed to deny that there had been a history of this neighborhood before about 1970 or 1980 and that didn't seem right to me either. Again, I knew that this place had a history even if I didn't know the details of it and I got curious because I am always curious about the history of the place I am, whether it's the place I live or a place I am visiting it is kind of the way I look at cities, at the world.
28:33	

	I am always wondering, how did that street get its name, or why is that building turned in a weird way on that lot. I don't always necessarily do anything about that curiosity but I have it and in the case of this neighborhood and my house, I knew there was a history before I got here. I knew there was a history before my neighbors got here. So, I decided I was going to find out what that history was and started digging into who had lived here before I did. Here, meaning this house, this land but also the wider neighborhood, who had lived here before I did, before the house was even built. What did they call this place? I am calling it the Golden Gate District, or Golden Gate Neighborhood. There's some folks now who are trying to call it NOBE but it has had these other names. What were those names? So, I started digging into that.
29:36	Part of me, I know, was looking for some kind of absolution from that history, to say well, this neighborhood, this land has changed, residents have changed hands a lot of times before and I am just a particle in this next wave. Probably a stupid thing to look for but I know that some part of me was looking for a way to say, well, I am not a bad person. I am just part of this. I am caught up in this force that I can't do anything about. It ends up being a lot more complicated than that. The upshot was I just ended up digging through, trying to dig into the history of this place deeper than NOBE and deeper than people saying "historic residents" to mean people who have been living here for a few decades because the word history can have a lot of different definitions. **SM:** What would you say were some of the highlights of your research and discoveries? **Brock:** I certainly found what I expected to find in that, yes, this land has changed hands many times before, often in ways that were profoundly destructive and coercive. Starting
30:52	when the Spanish first showed up, they claimed this place in the 1500s but they didn't really

	show up here until the late 1700s and up from the south marched the Spanish from on their trail of establishing missions in California and rationalizing the landscape. There were people already living here, the Ohlone and the native inhabitants of this place were not – the Spaniards regarded the native inhabitants to this place as essentially non-human or as fodder for their machine. There was no concept of, well, somebody else owns this place, it's ours now. Starting from there, there have been, depending on your perspective, more or less coercive or destructive changes of ownership since then. So, yeah, from colonization to the way that the post-gold rush, sort of Anglo-American arrivals more or less stole the land from those who had owned it from a Spanish land grant to the way that a real estate crash in the late 2000s ends up taking land and houses from people probably through no fault of theirs, in a lot of case, of their own. So, yes I found this
32:33	history of cycles of displacement for a lot of reasons, a lot of forces that are way bigger than individual people making choices but along the way I ended up learning a whole lot more about the losers, I guess, in those fights or in those cycles of displacement. And starting to see what's happening now, yes, that's part of this long train, this cycle of history but also as a series of failures, continually failing to account for the people who are living here now and our need to treat them as humans. We do not do a good job in the United States of building cities that are accessible to a wide range of people. We don't preserve affordability of places to live. We're seeing that especially now in the Bay Area. Not exclusively in the Bay Area, but especially now. We certainly don't do a good job of doing that at the neighborhood level. We may have parts of the city that we push lower income people into through various mechanisms but we do
34:09	not do a good job of making neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block, a city

	accessible and affordable. The way that people are being displaced now in the Golden Gate neighborhood in part through people like me, is yeah, sure, the next generation of cycle of displacement. But it's also an opportunity for us to try to figure out how to build a better city. Our policy mechanisms in the United States and at the local level, our policy mechanisms from top to bottom don't account for that. We have to do better. History doesn't give us a whole lot of answers about how to do better, unfortunately. Along the way, doing my research, I certainly got a healthy dose of empathy for the people who lost their land, lost their houses along the way, who were told that you don't really have a claim on this place. It doesn't really belong to you anymore because the rules have changed. And who often through no fault of their own, through the fault of other people and forces
35:23	beyond their control were erased from the landscape. I also learned that it's very easy to be erased from the landscape, that a whole culture can disappear in decades and an individual person's name can disappear even faster than that. I know the names of the people who owned this land and this house before I did because I went and dug them up. Most people aren't going to do that for their own house, and why would they? But if I hadn't done that, I would never have known who those people were. It just disappears. I still think a lot about the impermanence of ownership and how much of a pretense really ownership seems to be. I say, because it's the shorthand that we all agree to, I own this house. My wife and I own this house. Even putting aside the fact that what it really means is we borrowed a lot of money from a bank for the right to live in this house. When I am gone, when she is gone, we don't have any kids, maybe we will, I don't know, but when we're gone someone else will own this house. We will be utterly forgotten from this place. So, it's hard for me to kind of compress what all that research gave me. I

37:12	definitely am not done processing it. But a couple of things stood out. One is, again, more empathy for the people who were on the losing side of history along the way and much less confidence in my own right to calls this place my home. I have much less a secure feeling about saying this is my place, this is my house. That's the short hand we all agree to but on a long enough time scale, it doesn't belong to anybody. **SM:** So what to do about the conundrum of amount of history, timespan, amount of time that you spent doing this research, what do you think is a meaningful way for people in this neighborhood, but maybe particularly in this neighborhood to know about the history? **Brock:** A way for people to know about the history? I think the history, the longer term history of this neighborhood is really interesting and it was fun to research and fun for me to read about still. I wrote a bunch about it with no expectations that anyone else would ever find that interesting. Most people won't and that's fine. I think more important for just kind of everyday life and thinking about your place in the neighborhood is knowing about what happened before you got here that your neighbors know about. You can't pin a
38:38	neighborhood to one particular point in history. Calling people "historic residents," probably not the right term still but the people who are here now, who have been here a long time, they matter as people, again, and they have a right to be here and stay here and they have got stories, and they have knowledge about how things used to be which is maybe worse, maybe better depending on your perspective. When you arrive in a neighborhood, if you just have moved there from wherever, somewhere else, you don't know the place, I think you do have a responsibility to be a good neighbor, to be as neighborly as you can, to be as open as you can to the people around you, which I fail at doing a lot but... you have a responsibility to not only get to know the

39:47	people around you but to understand what you're walking into 'cause it's somebody else's place too. Again, the shorthand is, I own this house and this little rectangle that it's on. Even if you rent, you can say this is my place but the place belongs to a lot of other people. They may not have a right to walk into your front door, but as soon as you walk out of your front door you're walking into other people's places. So, I think you have a responsibility, again, not only to know your neighbors names and, you know, their pets names, or whatever it is, but to get a sense of what they know about the place and how they define the place because ultimately you are kind of all assembling this conglomerated definition of what the neighborhood is, of what the street is and no one person has a right to do that. You know, real estate agents don't get to rebrand, unilaterally rebrand as NOBE. I don't get to unilaterally decide what this neighborhood is. And I can describe it in certain ways that I am sure would reflect all these biases that I have but if you talk to my neighbor, she will describe it in very different ways and have a different set of adjectives that she'll use. And probably there is some overlap. (Inaudible) There's some overlap but it's my job, it's
41:33	incumbent on me to know what her feeling about the neighborhood is and what my other neighbors and the folks across the street, and again, I am not the friendliest person in the world. I don't project openness in my personality and so I fail at that a lot but I do think that every person, you know, within their own sort of social ability had a responsibility to find out what the story of the place is and not to decide on your own what the story of the place is. **SM:** So, do you have some adjectives that you want to throw out? **Brock:** One of the adjective that I use to describe this neighborhood that I used already in our conversation, one of the adjectives I use to describe this neighborhood is welcoming. It
42:46	

	has felt that way. It felt that way when we were living further north and it feels that way here on this block. There is a reputation that people like me, younger, whiter, wealthier people moving into the neighborhood have a reputation for not being friendly, for not being open to what's already here, to being face down in phone, or whatever, and not plugging into neighborhood networks and that's an earned reputation. It is for a reason. But this neighborhood is very welcoming if you let it be. The places we've lived, the people we've gotten to know, they want you to be part of the community; they want to get to know you for good reasons, for all the right reasons – so welcoming. Other adjectives, changing, which is a gerundive adjective, changing which is obvious but really important. This neighborhood is becoming. And every neighborhood is I guess, all the time. But you can look around and see other neighborhoods in Oakland that are not changing as rapidly. This one is changing really quickly and becoming the next version of itself whatever that's going to be.
44:29	Now there's all this stuff down here that I feel like I need to move, but when we got here, these trees, obviously were here; we don't know how old they are; they hadn't been pruned in any way in a really long time and we're not sure how much longer this plum tree is going to be with us, but they were kind of the centerpiece. There was some haphazard ornamental planting and then they just put down a bunch of fresh sod here, some of which is still here, right, but we don't really have a desire for a lawn. That's not something we aspire to. So, gradually we have been, again, mostly my wife, she's really the big gardener, we've been taking bits of lawn out, especially in the front, reclaiming it for some ornamental stuff, some edible stuff, herb bed here. When we built these raised beds, I guess it's been two years now and they're in between cycles now. I think the plan is to plant peas, a lot of different peas for the winter but we have been gradually adding more edible
45:37	

	stuff: blackberry, raspberry, blueberry over there. The apple tree is incredibly productive. It looks kind of funny but it is incredibly productive and the plum tree, again, not sure how long that has left in this world. It produces a lot of fruit which doesn't really taste like anything.
	SM: Over there we saw a couple of tomatoes infiltrating.
	Brock: So, we had our tomatoes in both of these beds and pulled the last tomatoes off the vines a while back but our neighbors are growing edible stuff on the other side of the fence there and, yeah, some of their tomatoes decided that they belonged over here, which is fine. We aren't complaining. Some of their tomatoes, some of their green beans decided to clamber over. This fence was redone maybe a year ago. Our back fence neighbors, it's two families – two brothers with their prospective families on each floor. One is an architect the other is a contractor and they wanted to redo the back fence. They have the full 50-foot lot
47:09	there and they came around the corner and talked to us and said here's what we're thinking. You know, they showed us the design and they got our input, or at least our okay, which is great. We had them redo this side fence while they were at it, and they redid our front fence. It has been nice to live behind a contractor who has reasonable rates. I forgot what I was going to say. Anyway, the fence is new. My only regret, not even a complaint, my only regret is that we didn't cut some sort of little doorway into it. In part, because both of those families have kids and they are occasionally losing balls on this side and I am happy to throw them back over, but I would be equally happy for them to walk through here and just pick them up and go back out. The tomatoes are welcome on this side of the fence, but so are the kids if they ever wanted to come over here. But that's not what we do, I guess, anymore. We put fences up and we don't leave that sort of porosity.

48:06	My neighbor, Mrs. Jenkins, talks about a time when she first moved here in the mid '80s where there were none of these impenetrable fences between the lots. You could stand here and see all the way to San Pueblo Avenue and people put them up for security reasons eventually. It is nice to have a little privacy and it's also nice to have some porosity here. I guess, you know, there'd be downsides if people could just get through, security downsides if people could just get through here. We like our back neighbors and do kind of wish that it was a little easier to get, to sort of connect to them instead of just walking all the way around the block. As it is pretty much dead obvious from the street, my house is identical to my neighbors.
49:14	My neighbor Mrs. Jenkins has been here since 1985 or '86 and there are a lot of, around this neighborhood and other parts of Oakland there are a lot of houses with twins or triplets all in little clusters. That was kind of the dominant development, or one of the dominant development patterns in this area and other parts of the country for a long time. People would buy one, or two, or three – people would buy two or three lots right next to one another and build a couple or three houses, one to live in the other two to rent or maybe to sell. And this is a little bit of a different set up. For one thing, instead of it being two separate full-sized original lots, it's really just one lot that was cut in half but it was bought by a family in 1905, right before the big earthquake. This lot, which was originally twice the size, was bought by a family in 1905. There was a house here on this side already and a smaller older house from the 1890s or something. That family, the Cavanaugh's, built that house in '05 and started living there and they were renting the older, smaller house that was here. Then after the earthquake '06 all these, like a quarter million people fled San
50:52	Francisco to the East Bay and those initially temporary refugees, a lot of them decided to

	put down roots here and not go back and this neighborhood and a few other parts of Oakland saw a significant building boom at the time. A lot of the houses on this street were built from '06 until about 1920 when the big boom in construction was. So, that house was there before the earthquake. The Cavanaugh's built this one in 1912. They rented that older, smaller house for a while but then tore that down, built this one and just reused the plans that they used for their original house. There were a couple different family members living in either house for a little while and then they built the other house on the other side. So, the Cavanaugh's built that third house in the early 1920s; I can't remember the year. Another member of the family lived there. They were
52:02	renting one of them in the middle here. I don't remember off the top of my head which one was rented and I think mine was the rental for a while. As people passed away, they moved away, they shuffled around, my house ended up being the last house in which that family, the Cavanaugh family lived. I just blanked on her name. Do you remember from the stuff I was reading? **SM:** Maude? **Brock:** Not Maude. If I weren't sitting here trying to remember it, I would remember it. Anyway, so the last – my house was the last house where any Cavanaugh lived on this block. The last member of the family left in either 1969 or 1970. So, here are these three houses that were all built by the same family and more or less by the same person that were part of really giving this block its shape. But that name is gone and those people are essentially forgotten. If I hadn't gone and kind of looked them up, 'cause I was curious, I wouldn't know that; no one would know that. So, again, it's this thing about impermanence and leaving a mark on a place is something I think about almost every time I walk out my door
53:40	

	and look to my right, or left if I am looking at my house and there is this, there are these two other houses that are built by the same people that, for all their resemblance, there is no – that history is completely evaporated. **SM:** What did your neighbor know about the relationship of the two houses? **Brock:** I don't think that she knew anything about who had built them. She knew that they looked alike because that's obvious. You can't miss that part. I don't think that she knew much at all about who the family was, when they'd been built, what the relationship had been. We have this narrow passageway between our houses. It is not even three feet wide, part of the odd set up here is that is a shared easement between our houses and the reasons that that exists is because these were built for members of the same family to live in. That makes sense if you have family members in each house. It makes a little less sense, maybe a lot less sense without that. We get along just fine. That's okay for us. But it is really an odd, that passageway, the closeness of the houses, not just the fact that they are the same plan, but the fact that they're less than three feet apart, the roofs are almost
55:04	touching, you know, is this odd legacy of this family ownership and family building. What you don't really see in most of the other twin and triplet sets in this area, because most of them were built as a place to live and then kind of an investment houses or houses. So, the assumption was the people living in those additional houses in those clusters would be strangers, or renters and not members of the family. We have this kind of outlier, an expression of that phenomenon building, of reusing house plans but expressed in this odd way. **(Audio Ends)**

Resources

These titles are jumping-off points for further research. The knowledgeable librarians and archivists at Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room and the African American Museum & Library at Oakland can help you find additional information. These two treasured resources, both located in downtown Oakland, have vast collections of archival primary source materials, including newspaper articles, journals, photos, postcards and scrapbooks.

The Golden Gate Branch Library has a special relationship with the African American Museum & Library at Oakland. In 1982, the East Bay Negro Historical Society, a citizen-led initiative, was invited to establish an African American collection in the Golden Gate Branch, the first library in Oakland to have a predominantly African American focus. Later, the organization changed its name to the Northern California Center for Afro-American History & Life. In 1994, this organization joined with the City of Oakland to create the African American Museum & Library at Oakland (AAMLO). AAMLO reopened in the former Charles S. Greene Library in 2002.

To learn more or make an appointment, visit www.oaklandlibrary.org.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM & LIBRARY AT OAKLAND

Shades of North Oakland photo collection, 1999.

The Official Black Panther Party Historical Tour Guide, Huey Newton Foundation, circa late 2000s.

Visions Toward Tomorrow, Lawrence P. Crouchett, Lonnie Bunch III, Martha Kendall Winnacker, 1989.

GOLDEN GATE BRANCH LIBRARY

Early Emeryville Remembered: Historical Essays, Emeryville Historical Society, 1996.

From Labor to Reward, Martha C. Taylor, 2016.

Temescal Legacies: Narratives of Change from a North Oakland Neighborhood, Jeff Norman, 2006.

OAKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY, MAIN BRANCH

Killing the Messenger, Thomas Peele, 2012.

Oakland Tribune archives, https://newspaperarchive.com/.
Access at any Oakland Public Library.

Resources Continued

OAKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY'S OAKLAND HISTORY ROOM

Emeryville Historical Society quarterly journals, 1990 – present.

Golden Gate Neighborhood clippings file.

Images of America: Emeryville, Emeryville Historical Society, 2005.

WEBSITES

East Bay Yesterday, a podcast series by local historian Liam O'Donoghue, covering many underrecognized local heroes, https://eastbayyesterday.com/.

Emeryville Historical Society, the group's online presence includes some articles from their journals, https://emeryvillehistorical.org/.

Oakland Heritage Alliance, a non-profit that connects Oakland's past to its present and future through walking tours and a newsletter, http://oaklandheritage.org/.

Oakland Wiki, a crowd-sourced pool of knowledge started in 2012 about many of Oakland's people, places and events, https://localwiki.org/oakland/.

COMMONS ARCHIVE

GOLDEN GATE LIBRARY LOCAL COLLECTION

SERIES 1

A Renovator's History

Blacks in Oakland: 1852 - 1987

Community Profile: Golden Gate Neighborhood

Golden Gate Conversations

Golden Gate Neighborhood Conditions

Golden Gate Walking Tour

I Must Not Forget

On Becoming A Historic Resident

Thanks

This local collection series is born from the wisdom and work of many Oakland local historians, neighbors, librarians, researchers, thinkers, creatives and writers. I am deeply grateful for their generosity in sharing their knowledge and expertise. And to you, readers and researchers, the potency of this collection lives on through your curiosity.

History is never finished: you can continue to reveal the complexity of the story of this place by sharing your thoughts and experiences on the Commons Archive cards.

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CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL

Advancing California through the arts and creativity.

About marksearch

Cultural researcher, literacy educator and artist Sue Mark, a long-time North Oakland neighbor, has a keen interest in over-looked stories. As part of the marksearch team, she designs ways for people to share their stories for empowerment and preservation. With conversation as her primary tool, she develops interactive projects that make space for social memory. Whether pushing a work cart designed as a mobile park or towing a traveling billboard by tandem bike, marksearch engages people to share personal histories that create lasting neighborhood narratives.

Since 2000, Sue has partnered with Bruce Douglas (her husband), an engineer and inventor with a passion for repurposing materials. Their practice as the marksearch team blends their diverse skills and shared life. From neighbor-led walking discussions to sidewalk conversations, commemorative plaques and murals recognizing the collective knowledge of many generations, their projects move beyond aesthetic experience. The marksearch team has implemented interdisciplinary projects with community groups, historians, urban planners and municipalities throughout Oakland and across the globe.

marksearch.org

Of 18 copies, this book is number 13

PHOTO KEY (IMAGES LEFT TO RIGHT)

FARMERS' MARKET Susan Park, food business incubator manager at Phat Beets Food Justice Market & CSA 2014 Photo by Pamela Palma	**HISTORY RESOURCE** Card catalog at Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Room 2014	**NEIGHBORHOOD CELEBRATION** Golden Gate Branch Library's block party to celebrate Commons Archive 2017 Photo by Amber Hoy	**HISTORIC SITE** Charles Klinkner's real estate 'headquarters' in the town of Golden Gate 1885 Courtesy Emeryville Historical Society	**NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS** Family photo of Benjamin Williams, founder of Williams Low-Cost Appliances, now owned by his nephew, at 6451 San Pablo Avenue 2015
HISTORIC SITE Mural painted by Dan Fontes in 1999 on the old Golden Gate Recreation Center at 1075 62nd Street 2015	**NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVIST** Family photo of Ruth Lasartemay with mother, one of the founders of the East Bay Negro Historical Society 1947	**HISTORIC SITE** Stanford Avenue greenway, once tracks for the Southern Pacific Railroad & the East Bay Electric Lines 2015	Commons Archive COMMONS ARCHIVE commons archive Commons Archive Commons Archive Commons Archive Commons Archive Commons Archive	**HISTORIC SITE** The Lasartemay's East Bay Negro Historical Society Museum at 4519 Grove Street (now MLK Jr. Way) 1976 Courtesy African American Museum & Library at Oakland
LONG-TIME NEIGHBOR Robin Freeman, planner & environmentalist at Communities' Crossing, a series of neighborhood history events 2014 Photo by Pamela Palma	**NEIGHBORHOOD CELEBRATION** Promotional poster for 'Love Our Neighborhood Day,' a one-day event closing part of San Pablo Avenue 2014 Photo by Gene Anderson	**NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVISTS** The Lasartemays, founders of the East Bay Negro Historical Society Oakland Tribune, 1981 Courtesy African American Museum & Library at Oakland	**NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVISTS** Aztec dancers Gerardo Omar Marin & Ernesto Hernandez Olmos at PLACE for Sustainable Living's annual Creating Commons event 2014	

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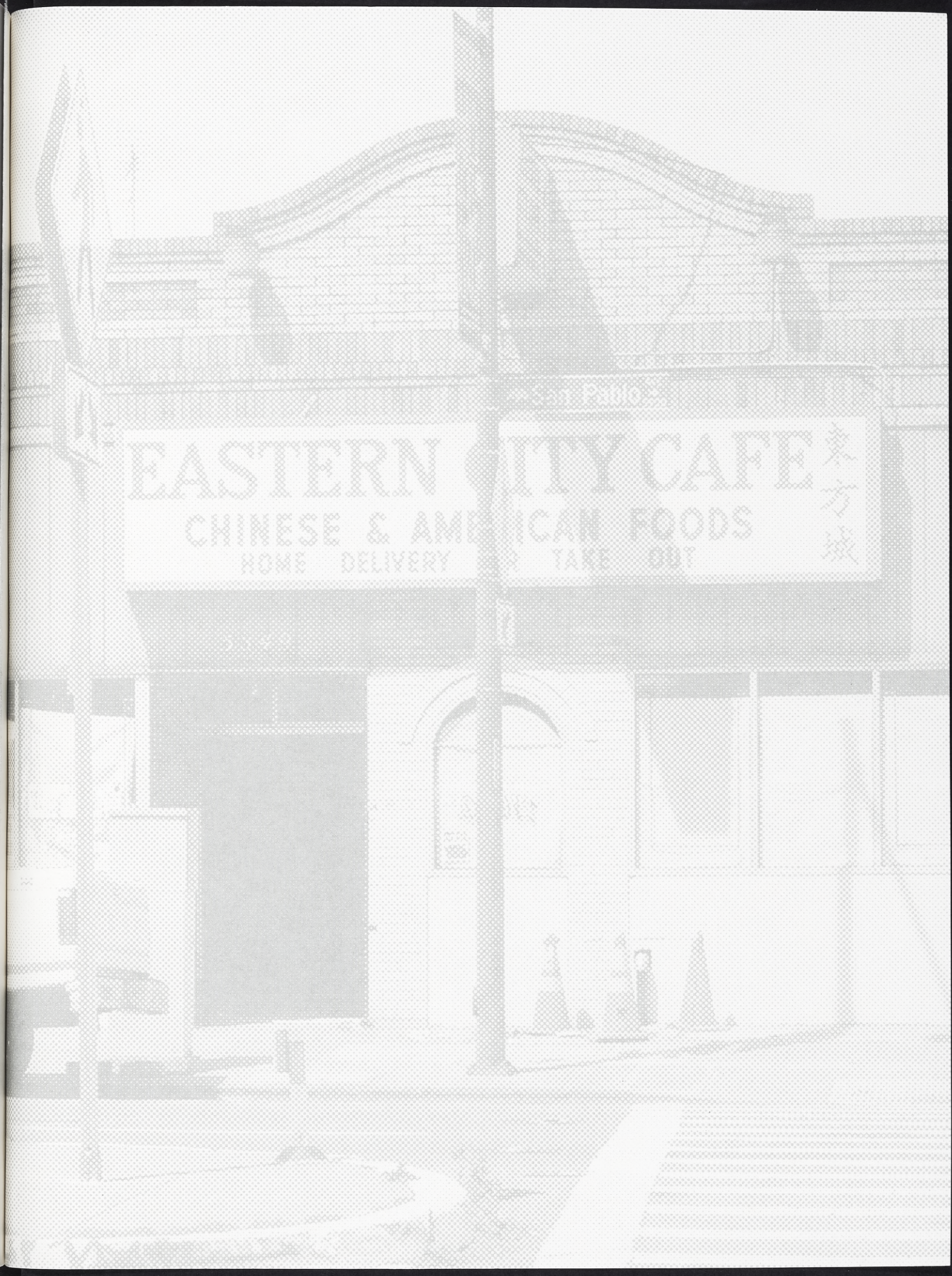
EASTERN
ITY CAFE
CHINESE & AME
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Eastern City Cafe, a family-owned restaurant,
1970s–2016, on San Pablo Avenue near 59th Street

Photo by Sue Mark

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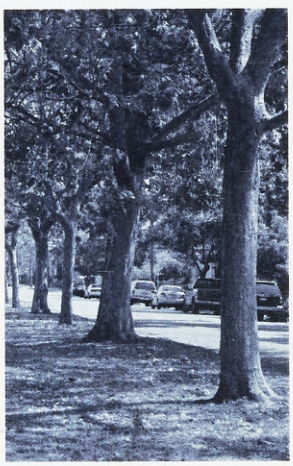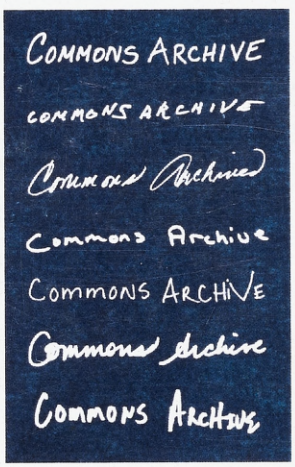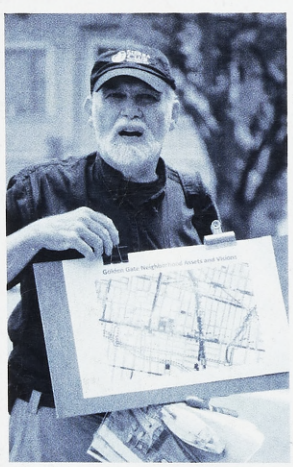
GOLDEN GATE LIBRARY LOCAL COLLECTION